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CHRISTIAN COURIER

Mainline decline: Lessons from church history

Kevin Flatt

What's going on in the mainline Protestant churches in this country? The recent news that an Anglican priest offered communion to a dog is only the latest (see story on page 8), and perhaps the most bizarre, in a series of developments that can leave the rest of us shaking our heads. We hear of bishops blessing same-sex unions, hymnal editors removing references to the blood of Jesus, and pastors denying that God answers our prayers.

Of course, there are many things to admire in the heritage and present ministry of these churches, and many of their people disagree with the direction taken by their leaders. But it is also clear that the overall movement of many leaders and people in these churches has been away from the faith of the apostles, church fathers and reformers.

Few of the readers of this newspaper want to go down that road. But what can we do about it? Are there lessons we can learn from what has happened to these churches?

As a historian, I teach my students about the complexity and uniqueness of historical events. Nothing ever happens the same way twice. Yet I also believe that there are certain patterns in history that can teach us things about the way people and institutions work. If we approach the past with a sound biblical worldview, and an awareness of the complexity of history, we can carefully draw out wisdom for the present.

So what can the past teach us about churches losing their way in the modern West? Here are three of the most important lessons.

Biblical authority is the linchpin

The doctrinal and moral drift of the mainline churches began with the questioning of biblical authority. Often this started innocently enough, as biblical scholars sought a better understanding of the historical development of the biblical writings. Unfortunately, however, many of these scholars had accepted the Enlightenment view that human reason could properly sit in judgment of the Bible. As a result, they put their own convictions alongside the Bible like a checklist and questioned the parts that didn't fit with what they already believed.

Did certain stories speak of God's miraculous actions in history? Well, because educated men like biblical scholars knew that such things were impossible, those stories must be myths or exaggerations. Did certain prophets make startlingly accurate predictions about events in ancient history? Well, because no one knows the future, the prophets must have written their "prophecies" after the events in question. At bottom, this was an elevation of human wisdom above God's wisdom.

Although this questioning process began with seemingly less important matters (did the Exodus really happen the way it is described in the Bible?) in the end it reached to the very heart of the faith (did Jesus really rise from the dead?). The final result was to drive a wedge between God and the Bible, like the snake in the garden who asked, "Did God really say. . . ?" Nearly all of what went wrong in the subsequent history of mainline Protestantism can be traced back to this point.

If we want to avoid sharing that fate, we need to be Bible-believing

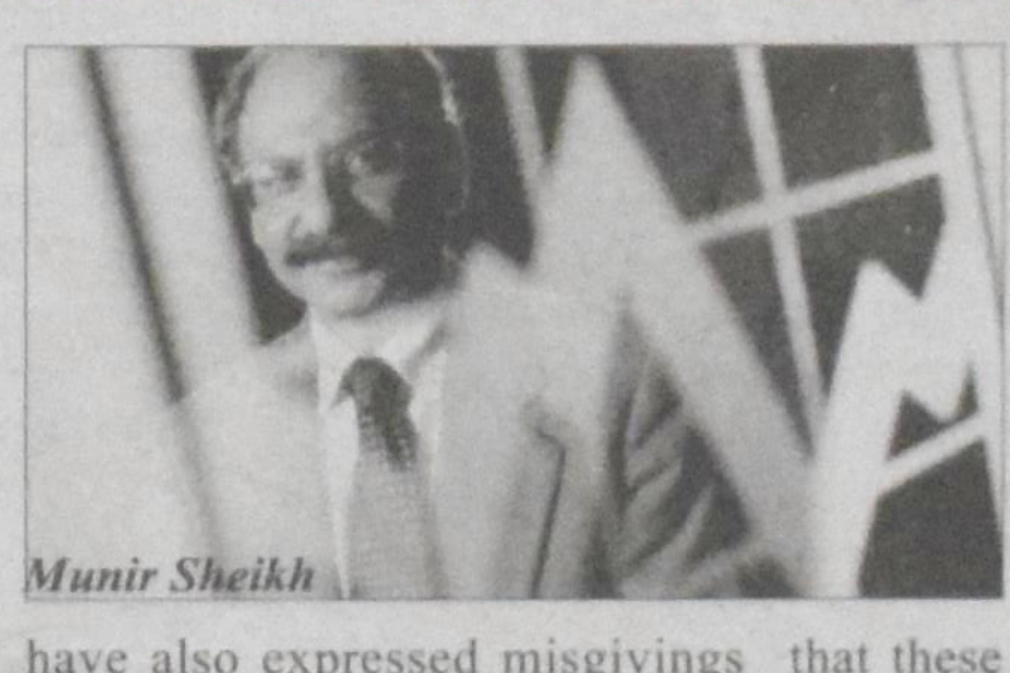
See **Mainline decline** on p. 2

Research has concluded that the strongest churches are those that are serious about what they believe, maintain clear boundaries, and expect sacrifice from their members.

No consensus on the census

Harold Alkema

OTTAWA, Ontario – The recent federal government's proposal to scrap the mandatory long-form census has drawn fire from most of the provinces and territories. Only Alberta has decided to reserve judgement until more information is available. The other provinces have stated that they are deeply concerned about the impact that a voluntary long-form census could have on essential social programs such as housing, education, transit and the delivery of French language services. Without the demographic data provided by the census, it may become more difficult for both levels of government to project the level of demand in these vital areas. Doctors, educators, former government officials and charities have also expressed misgivings about a voluntary census, claiming that budgetary decisions affecting government programs might not be as well-informed as under the old system.



Munir Sheikh

Legal penalties

Under the current legislation, one-third of all Canadian homes are sent the short-form census documents and one-fifth are sent the long-form census, which includes over fifty questions on ethnicity and home life. Failing to complete and send the long-form version can result in fine or imprisonment. Premier Ed Stelmach of Alberta has claimed that these threats of prosecution are too heavy-handed. The Harper government states that its proposal to shift to a voluntary long-form census was initiated by the concerns of average citizens complaining that the long-form census invaded their privacy. Apparently, members of Parliament deal with numerous grievances of this nature when the survey goes out every five years.

See **Census** on p. 2

News

Mainline decline *continued*

people, and not only in theory: we need to know the Scriptures, teach them to our children, and obey them in our lives.

Churches need immune systems

A second common characteristic of the mainline churches that appeared in the early stages of the slide away from orthodoxy was a lackadaisical attitude toward false teaching. Several top church leaders in the late nineteenth century, even though they themselves held to a biblical faith, were willing to allow younger ministers and seminary professors to contradict the Bible and the doctrinal standards of their churches. Because of a misplaced sense of confidence or a desire to avoid conflict, they failed to guard the flock against the savage wolves that arose among their own number (Acts 20:28-31). Eventually the "wolves" ended up in the positions of authority, and trained new generations of ministers who eventually took their teachings to every corner of the churches.

The New Testament warns us again and again to be on our guard against professed Christians, especially leaders, who would distort the truth, justify their immoral lifestyles, enrich themselves through their positions or discredit the name of Christ through hypocrisy. It supplies ways of lovingly but firmly confronting and disciplining these people, with the dual aim of bringing them to repentance and reconciliation while protecting the church.

A church that fails to take these warnings seriously is like a person without a working immune system. Such a person may survive for years without getting sick, but as soon as a virus comes along, it can infect him unopposed.

To be sure, immune systems can be overactive, producing allergies because they attack things that are really harmless. Good church discipline requires patience and wisdom to discern true threats from mere irritants. But it is better to risk having allergies than to have no immune system at all.

Accommodation leads to irrelevance

A third commonality in the history of the mainline Protestant churches has been the promotion of accommodation as a survival strategy. The advice followed usually went something like this: "People today have a hard time believing stories about God speaking and dead men coming back to life. They want to be able to have sex before they get married, sleep in on Sundays and generally run their own lives. They like hearing about God's love, but not his wrath against sin. If the church keeps giving them a hard time and sticks to outdated ideas, no one will come to church any more. For the church to survive it will have to get with the times by dropping its old dogmas and taboos."

John Spong

Sophisticated-sounding versions of this advice have been promoted by figures ranging from American bishop John Spong to United Church of Canada minister Gretta Vosper. I call it the "change or die" story. But does the advice work?

Not only does accommodation fail to save churches, it hurries the very decline that it is supposed to prevent. A growing body of sociological and historical research into church membership and commitment over the past 50 years has concluded that the strongest churches are those that are serious about what they believe, maintain clear boundaries, and expect sacrifice from their members. Churches that water down their beliefs and lower their standards lose members.

Canadian church statistics from recent decades bear this out. The churches that have most vigorously pursued the path of accommodation have experienced severe and ongoing losses of members and participants since the 1960s. The United Church, for a long time Canada's largest Protestant church, is in particularly bad shape; if the consistent trend of recent decades continues, its Sunday school enrolment will hit zero ten years from now, and membership in general will be only a couple of decades behind.

In contrast, churches that continue to preach and practice a biblical faith without apology have remained stable or growing during the same period. These churches remain firmly grounded in biblical orthodoxy while creatively reaching out to those around them with the good news of Jesus Christ.

Do we believe in biblical authority, and live it out in our lives? Do our churches have working immune systems? Do we avoid the path of accommodation while reaching out to our neighbours? If the answer to any one of these questions is "no," history warns us that we have some work to do.

Dr. Kevin Flatt (kflatt@redeemer.ca) *is an assistant professor of history at Redeemer University College. He is currently working on a book based on his doctoral research about the decline of evangelicalism in the United Church of Canada.*

Census *continued*

Since he took office, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has led a push for Statistics Canada (StatsCan) to track specific economic data rather than broad-based social trends. The move to a voluntary long-form census seems to be part of this trend and an attempt to streamline the way the bureau operates. Harper and company may be reluctant to change their entire approach to statistical research simply because the provinces request it.

StatsCan begs to differ

While the federal government claims that their voluntary process is simpler and more respectful to Canadians who do not want to surrender their personal data, StatsCan itself seems to be in an uproar over the change. Munir Sheikh, chief statistician and the agency's top bureaucrat, resigned his post over the change on July 27. Sheikh says that a voluntary survey could never take the place of a mandatory one. Minister of Industry Tony Clement was shocked by Sheikh's resignation, saying there was never any indication from StatsCan that the agency objected to the voluntary long-form survey document. But Sheikh maintains that the integrity of StatsCan will be compromised by the Conservatives' proposal.

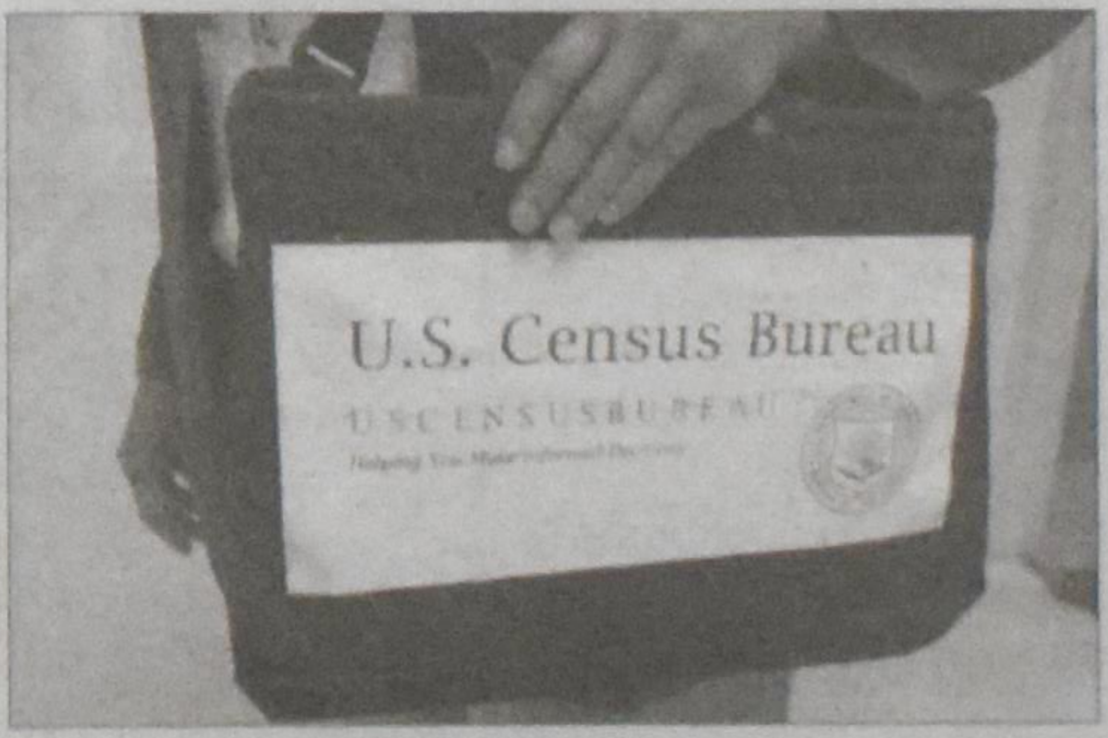
Researchers concerned

While bureaucrats are deeply concerned about alterations to the census, social researchers also have many apprehensions. This is mainly because census records are such a rich source of information for their work – one that they could lose if the census is made voluntary. Perhaps ironically, researchers themselves may be able to offer a solution to the issue, because the databases they maintain can be a storehouse of information capable of replacing a mandatory census. In Scandinavian countries, for example, mandatory censuses have been abandoned and demographic information is stored and retrieved electronically. Each citizen has a personal identification number which is used to collect information on an open national registry, making censuses unnecessary.

No resolution in sight

While alternatives might exist, the Federal government's detractors continue to insist that the status-quo is best. At the same time, the Conservatives maintain that the mandatory long-form census is too invasive. As Maxime Bernier, a Conservative MP from Quebec, says, "Whatever the presumed usefulness of these data, I don't believe it justifies forcing people to answer intrusive questions about their lives, under threat from a fine or jail time if they don't." Although it's hard to believe, census-taking has become the hot topic in the nation's capital this summer.

Harold Alkema (hjalkema75@hotmail.com) *works as a researcher with a private firm in Ottawa specializing mainly in Native Affairs and historical research.*



'We can't move forward until you mail it back'

All residents of the United States are counted every decade, as mandated by the U.S. Constitution. Being a year that ended in "0", 2010 was a census year. A massive marketing blitz directed at every segment of the population preceded the April 1 deadline, urging residents to "Be Counted!" Census forms were delivered by hand to every home in the United States by over a million newly-trained employees of the U.S. Census Bureau.

The Bureau can impose a $100 fine for failing to answer the 2010 Census questions or $500 for intentionally providing false information. So far, it has offered no indication that it actually intends to charge violators or impose these fines, but those who failed to complete and return their 2010 Census questionnaire were paid a second visit in the summer months. As of this printing, there was a 72 percent participation rate among residents.

News

Federal Judge rules *Proposition 8* unconstitutional

Peter J. Smith

SAN FRANCISCO, California, Aug. 4, 2010 (LifeSiteNews.com) – A federal judge has ruled that California's constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman is unconstitutional, because it excludes same-sex unions.

Chief Judge Vaughn Walker, who presides over the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, declared Proposition 8 had no "rational basis" in a 138-page ruling on the Perry v. Schwarzenegger case released Wednesday afternoon.

Walker struck down the amendment, which states "Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California," on the basis that it violated the equal protection and due process clauses of the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The judge dismissed the amendment, saying its restriction of marriage to heterosexual couples was "nothing more than an artifact of a foregone notion that men and women fulfill different roles in civic life." He also added that it seemed to him proponents of Prop. 8 were defending the amendment on the basis of "moral disapproval," which he said was "an improper basis on which to deny rights to gay men and lesbians" and enacted in law, "a private moral view that same-sex couples are inferior to opposite-sex couples."

"Proposition 8 places the force of law behind stigmas against gays and lesbians," Walker also stated, adding that homosexuals have suffered "social and legal disadvantages" from "stereotypes and misinformation."

"Proposition 8 fails to advance any rational basis in singling out gay men and lesbians for denial of a marriage license," ruled Walker. "Indeed the evidence shows Proposition 8 does nothing more than enshrine in the California constitution the notion that opposite sex couples are superior to same sex couples."

Walker's decision immediately enjoins further enforcement by California officials of Proposition 8.

The challenge to Proposition 8 was filed by Ted Olson and David Boies, famous opponents in the Bush v. Gore case, on behalf of a male homosexual couple and a lesbian couple, both denied marriage licenses. The case is expected to head to the U.S. Supreme Court and it is feared that it could become the Roe v. Wade of traditional marriage in the United States.

Randy Thomasson of the pro-family group SaveCalifornia responded that "Natural marriage, voter rights, the Constitution, and our republic called the United States of America have all been dealt a terrible blow. Judge Walker has ignored the written words of the Constitution, which he swore to support and defend and be impartially faithful to, and has instead imposed his own homosexual agenda upon the voters, the parents, and the children of California."

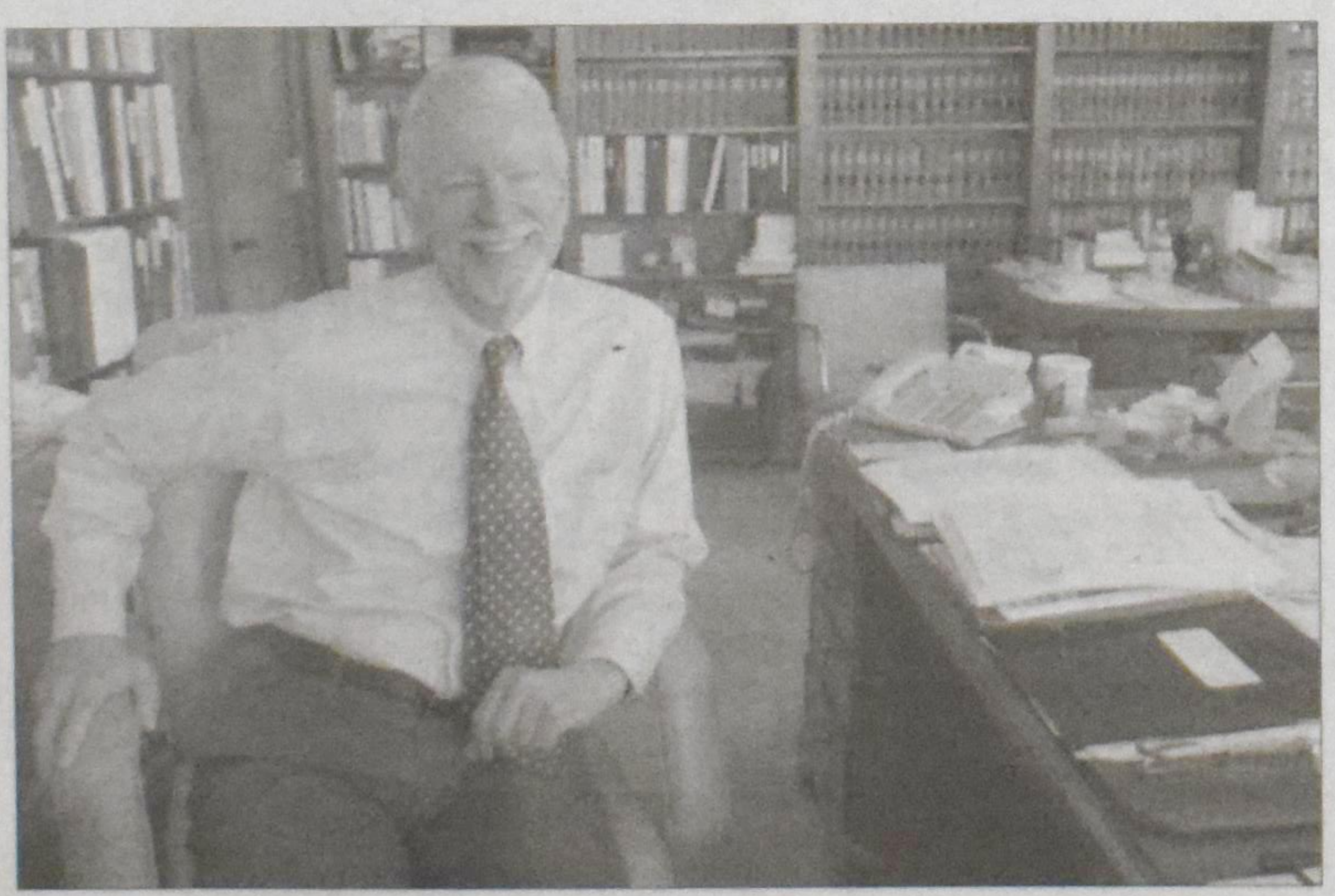
Walker, however, is himself an active homosexual, and some conservative critics of the Prop. 8 case contended that Walker would be too personally invested in the case to deliver an impartial outcome. Others pointed out that Walker has not had a history of proven bias in homosexual issues. He sided with the U.S. Olympics Committee in their copyright infringement case against the "Gay Olympics," and also put a lien on an AIDS-stricken organizer's home. But neither of those decisions was as personal as deciding the legal status of same-sex relationships, which Walker repeatedly asserted, were given second-class status by Prop. 8.

Walker also ruled that domestic partnerships did not satisfy the duty on California to let same-sex couples marry each other.

Anticipating Walker's ruling, Pro-family advocates have already filed a motion with the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to stay Walker's decision from taking effect, until an appeal can be sorted out.

Molly McKay of Marriage Equality USA (c.) reads the decision in the United States District Court proceedings challenging Proposition 8 outside of the Phillip Burton Federal Building in San Francisco, on Aug. 4.

ERIC RISBERG/AP



Judge Vaughn Walker in his chambers. Judge Walker ruled that Proposition 8, California's law banning gay marriage, is unconstitutional.

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Editorials

What matters most: learning to live in the present

May Drost

I refinished an old roll-top desk last year. Along with the grime, the mouse droppings, and the corroded pen nibs, I found some letters dated in the thirties, and also a business card for a roof maintenance service. The letters were in beautiful handwriting and full of homey details about gardening, canning, and cousin visits. On the back of the business card was the following mission statement: *Our Ideal: To make well and to trade fairly. To profit not alone in dollars, but in the good will of those with whom we deal. To correct our errors. To improve our opportunities and to rear from the daily work a structure which shall be known for all that is best in business.* Ah, the good old days when women were ladies who gardened and canned, when handwriting was legible, and when business dealings were upright and fair! How lovely the world was then, and how white the picket fences!

We all know a bit about idealizing and reconstructing the past: how we outsmarted our teachers in high school, how we bettered the boss in a confrontation, why we didn't get the job, win the race, catch the biggest trout…. We love books in which we can vicariously overcome hardships, win battles, and marry the beautiful princess or handsome prince when the struggle is over. We love to escape to a time when the world was supposedly simpler, the lines between good and evil were clearly drawn, and the good guys always won.

Advertizers as well as writers of fiction know the power of wishful thinking and are basically concerned with human longings on the one hand, and human fears on the other. I would suggest that these emotions of fear and longing also impact the way we reconstruct our personal experiences into the life stories we tell ourselves, our children, and others. Our emotions are an essential and absolutely valid (and valuable) part of our lives, but they can betray us into thinking that the past was *nobler* than the present, and that the future may well be *worse*. This kind of thinking has ramifications for our lives as Christians, because it can prevent us from knowing ourselves (i.e., being honest about ourselves), and being discerning about our times, both prerequisites for being effective Christians and helpful role models.Communication between the generations is healthy only if we tell the *truth* about ourselves and our times.

Dynamic Truth

So, yes, the past has its attractions. And, yes, that's partly because we have a way of nostalgically glossing over the negatives. The mission statement I found in my old desk, effective as it is, does not warrant the assumption that, back in the forties, all businesses were honest and existed for the betterment of their respective communities. Still, it's possible that Mr. Dennis of the *Specialized Roof Maintenance Service* left a legacy that has value for the present.

We live in the present: not in the past, not in the future. It is our task to sort out how we need to live *now*. If we're walking through a forest, and the path is not too clear, it doesn't help to keep looking over our shoulder. It also doesn't help to peer too far ahead. We need to keep our eye on the path immediately before us so that we can place our feet where they will allow us to take another step; that is, if we want to make any progress at all. If someone who was there before us left a map and some directions, so much the better. Still, the onus is on us to get where we need to be.

The thing is that Christian living is not based on the wisdom of the past, or guesswork about the future, but on the Truth. We have a rich heritage based on God's revelation of himself in the Bible, in Creation, and in his son, Jesus. The clear message this heritage gives us is that the Truth matters, and that it is vibrant, always current, always dynamic. It is not stuck in the past, nor will it be revealed only at some future time. It is a healing balm that we can live by right now; it is a light in the forest. If only we are willing to look at our lives honestly, clear away the clutter – the mouse droppings and the grime, as it were – we can then use what is left (cleansed and refinished) to sustain us on our journey in the present.

To glorify the past is to impoverish the present: let's not build picket fences where they're no longer needed!

May Drost is a retired teacher of English. She and her husband, Wayne, live in Sarnia, Ontario.

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Whose side are you standing on?

Bert Witvoet

Once in a while a discussion flares up, also in our paper, about whether or not we should take sides with Israel because it is God's chosen people. We printed two such letters in the previous issue (August 9). Those who support that idea invariably refer to Romans 11, which seems to indicate that Israel is still God's chosen people. And if that is so, the argument goes, we should also choose for Israel over against the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab world. After all, we want to stand on God's side. But I have a great deal of difficulty with that position. In fact, I think it's wrong and goes against what the book of Romans is telling us about who the new Israel is.

There seems to be some confusion among those who advocate taking Israel's side based on the notion that Israel remains God's chosen people. If you read Romans 11 carefully you will notice that this is not so. Only the remnant of Israel – those who embraced the gospel (like Paul himself) – together with the full number of the gentiles, represents the new Israel. Today, Jews who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ are also grafted back into the vine, and that is a glorious thing, because "how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree." There's nothing quite like a Jew turned Christian. But Israel as a nation cannot make the claim that they have been grafted back into this olive tree. Paul clearly talks about individuals and their families when he says, "if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again" (Romans 11:23).

A new dispensation

That is not to say that God may not have in mind a large-scale return of Jews to the vine, which is Christ. Verses 25-32 could be read that way. But that is apart from what Israel today represents as a nation. And if we do nurture the idea of a large-scale return on the part of the Jews, such hope should not influence our political stance over against Israel today.

We are not called upon to help God fulfil his promises. We don't want to follow Jacob and Rebecca's example, for example, when they deceived Isaac regarding the birth-right blessing promised by God to Jacob. God would have taken care of it in his own way. Rebecca and Jacob cheated Esau out of it, and showed that they did not trust God to keep his word.

We no longer live in the Old Testament dispensation. Ever since the resurrection and the ascension of Christ, God's focus has changed. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." God calls all nations to embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ so he can graft more and more branches into the vine. Jesus is the root of the vine, not Israel, and people from all nations can be and are being grafted into this plant.

Our a-priori stance toward Israel should not be one of favouritism. In other words, we should not automatically approve of every action taken by the Israeli. The Old Testament is full of stories that show God's disapproval of what Israel did. And he showed that disapproval while they were his chosen people. Israel today is a secular state that pays little attention to seeking first the Kingdom of God. We are not called upon to take the side of Israel, even if it is mostly a democratic nation. Democratic nations, as we know so well from our North-American context, don't promote the coming of the Kingdom of God anymore than totalitarian nations.

A new Israel

What, then, should our stance be toward Israel and the Palestinians? We are called upon to seek justice and mercy also in international affairs. What this means exactly I cannot say in this editorial. Every action and reaction has to be judged on its own merits. I am not suggesting that we should apply the principles of moral equivalency, either. I do believe that Israel has a right to defend itself against those who want to destroy it, and I do believe that the Palestinians are badly served by a corrupt leadership. Let me leave it at that for now.

The main point of this editorial is to say that our judgment of who is right and who is wrong should not be based on the premise that Israel is God's chosen people and that the Palestinians are not. Christ died for all, and through his death and resurrection he is cultivating a new Israel.

You can find an unusual anecdote in the book of Joshua that is quite instructive. Just before the fall of Jericho, Joshua met a man, who turned out to be the commander of the Lord's army (Joshua 5:13-15). Joshua asked this divine messenger, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" "Neither," he replied, "but as commander of the Lord I have now come." Imagine, Joshua is leading God's people into the Promised Land, but God, who will allow Israel to be victorious, cannot be considered to be on anyone's side, not even on Israel's side.

In South Africa we heard a schoolboy sing to his classmates: "Tell me, whose side are you standing on?" The answer given by his classmates was unequivocal: "I'm standing on the Lord's side." Notice, the introductory chant was not: "Tell me, whose side is God standing on?"

Anti-Goyism the oldest disease

Antonides really did it this time with his article "Isreal besieged" ("The Public Square," July 12 issue). He wants to defend the actions of the Israeli commandos who boarded the lead flotilla ship Mavi Marmara, on May 31, 2010. Look at this, *commandos* (who are trained to kill) boarded the Mavi Marmara, and the crew and passengers, ordinary people, defended themselves and their cargo with knives and clubs. Nine of them paid with their lives, while no Israelis were killed.

Harry defends the rights of the Israelis, but what about the rights of the Palestinians? In 1948, who defended the 737,000 Arabs who were forced from their homes and properties, when the State of Israel was founded? The trouble is that the Palestinians don't like it that every "Tom, Dick and *Harry*" can settle their ancestral homeland.

Anti-Semitism is "The world's oldest sickness" (Harry references David Solway), but I contend that there is an older sickness: Anti-Goyism. As Max Dimont writes in *Jews, God and History* (Penguin, 1962), "Again, it must be stressed that it was the Jews who first rejected the Pagans and Christians, not they who first rejected the Jews." Not much has changed since these words were written in Deuteronomy 28:13 "The LORD will make you the head, not the tail . . . you will always be at the top, never at the bottom." (NIV). We Goyum don't like to be the tail, and no one wants to be at the bottom.

Israel insists it has to be a *Jewish* state, and that is why there is a conflict in the Middle East. To stand unconditionally with Israel as it abuses its neighbours is wrong. Let the Israelis change their attitude, then maybe there will be no need for anti-Semitism.

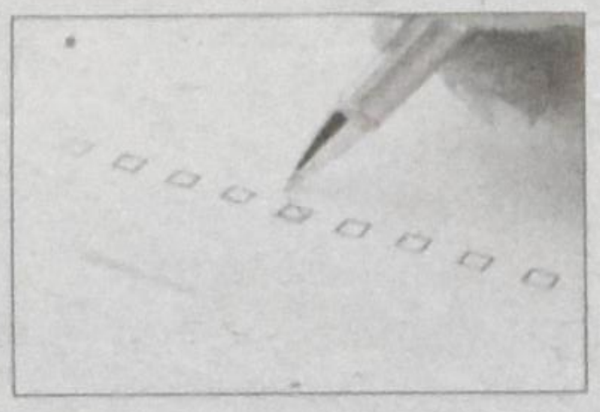
Jerry Stehouwer
Richmond Hill, Ontario

Omission

We inadvertently omitted the name of co-author Anthony Bösecke in "It's a dog's life – only better." (*CC* July 26) Anthony Bösecke is a writer with a special interest in human ecology.

For a copy of the article more clearly identifying which "dog" is speaking, please write to curtgesch@hotmail.com or Curt Gesch, 19712 Morden Road, Telkwa BC V0J 2X2.

Survey



If you missed the paper survey in July, there's still time to let us know what you think of Christian Courier. Fill out our electronic survey in five minutes at www.christiancourier.ca. We value your feedback on our mission statement, our layout, our writers and our plans for the future of *CC*. Thanks to those readers who have already sent in comments. – The editors.

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

Too close for comfort?

Relationships, like flowers in a garden, need to be tended and nurtured. The trick is finding a balance between too little or too much.

Question: I am 26 and have been in a relationship for two years with an easy-going man who is 29. When I met him he was active in various team sports. He enjoyed reading and expressed a desire to travel. He works in the service industry but talked about upgrading his education in order to do "more with his life." At the same time, I had a full life besides being with him. I enjoyed getting together with my girlfriends for hiking or biking. I attended seminars to keep my work in tourism fresh and challenging. Furthermore, I worked-out at least three times a week at my local gym.

From the onset I believed we were made for each other. Unfortunately, during the last year my boyfriend dropped out of team sports, reads the books I am reading rather than choosing his own, no longer talks about traveling and grumbles about upgrading his education while never signing up for anything at our local college. To make matters worse, he is presently 20 pounds overweight and has been calling or texting me far too much to find out what I am doing.

Response: You sound actively concerned about your boyfriend, and I am assuming you wish to stay in the relationship otherwise you would not be sharing this problem. First, I believe you were attracted to him because you value all the above characteristics: active in sports, interested in reading and traveling and keen to do more in life. Unfortunately, he sounds more like a couch potato now.

Second, I am not getting a sense of what the two of you do together in terms of recreation or anything else for that matter. While I think it is important for both of you to have a life besides one another, I strongly believe sharing some kind of activity or interest allows you to grow together in important ways. And so, if you love him, I would suggest you put some zest into the relationship by coming up with activities you are both interested in and giving it a priority in your life. It just may be he is becoming "too close for comfort" (from your perspective) because there is not enough couple time for him.

Third, it may be helpful for both of you to be clear about the values you share such as the importance of faith and family as well as expectations about one another in terms of career development. This kind of conversation may not be easy or comfortable, but it will give you a picture of the future should you eventually decide to marry.

Fourth, relationships, like flowers in a garden, need to be tended and nurtured. The trick is to find a balance. For most of us, too little or too much nurture does not allow for healthy personal or relationship development. We find a balance by being honest about ourselves in terms of our beliefs and values while also taking into consideration the need for a give-and-take attitude if we appreciate the relationship. At the same time, each of us is responsible only for our own part while giving the other space to be responsible for theirs, including getting off the couch and becoming more active and involved in one's relationships and life.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) *is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.*

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News

Ann Rice wants Christ without Christianity

Bert Witvoet

Ann Rice, well-known Christian author who used to write vampire novels, says in her Facebook account that she quit being a Christian. "I remain committed to Christ, as always, but not to being 'Christian' or being part of Christianity. It's simply impossible for me to 'belong' to this quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group."

Rice, 68, is known for *Interview With a Vampire* and other gothic novels. She had rejected the church early in her life but renewed her faith in recent years and returned to the Catholic Church. In 2008 she published "Called Out of Darkness: A Spiritual Confession."

Ann Rice elaborates on her recent decision in a later entry, when she writes: "I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-secular humanism. I refuse to be anti-science. I refuse to be anti-life. In the name of Christ, I quit Christianity and being Christian. Amen."

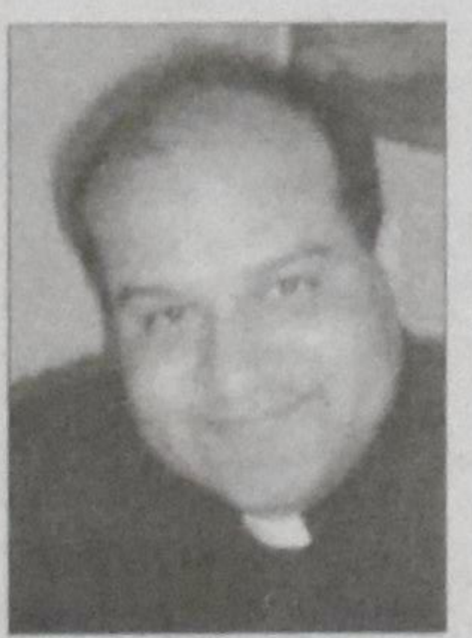
Not perfect, but…

A number of Christian commentators consider her stance a bit arrogant, if not unrealistic.

David Brogg of the *Washington Times* writes, "This famous vampire novelist and pop theologian announced last week that she was rejecting Christianity as an organized religion. She is still a Christian, mind you. Simply a better one than those millions who actually go to church."

Brogg takes issue with her statements about Christianity being anti-science, for one. "By asserting that our world was designed by a creator according to a logical blueprint, Christianity helped give birth to the idea that we could benefit by studying creation and discovering these underlying patterns. The opposition of some Christians to the teaching of evolution today hardly renders the diverse body of Christendom "anti science."

"No, the Church is not perfect," Brogg continues. "And neither is the synagogue. And no, it's not easy to live an active faith. It requires being in the muck of this world, rather than fleeing to the sterile purity of our imaginations. Yet it is precisely in the muck that so many heroes have demonstrated the ongoing relevance of their faith to a hurting world.



Package deal

According to *National Post* columnist Father Raymond J. De Souza, Anne Rice can't have Christ without Christianity. It's a package deal. "There is no way to get to Christ without the Church," he adds. "From the beginning the Christian story is about the Lord fashioning a people of his own…. So Christ without Christianity (and Judaism) is not possible, no matter how unappealing we Christians can be."

De Souza takes issue with those who want to be spiritual but not religious. "To be spiritual but not religious means to be in favour of a relationship with God, but without that God or that relationship having any defined content."

Closer to Christ

But there are supporters of Rice's decision, too. Michael Rowe of the *Huffington Post* thinks that by taking the position she has, Rice has never been more of a Christian. "Rice's decision to leave Christianity carries weight not only as a believer, but a mother. Her son, bestselling author Christopher Rice, is an outspoken and articulate gay rights activist and crusader."

Rowe considers Rice's repudiation of Christianity "a threefold clarion call, one that should not be written off as a publicity stunt by a bestselling author, or condescendingly dismissed by the Evangelical establishment…. There seems precious little *Christ* in *Christianity* as it's understood in America today."

Rowe apparently agrees with Rice that Christianity has become ignorant, bigoted and intolerant. "Rice has paradoxically moved herself closer to the essence of Christ's teachings than perhaps at any other time in her life," he concludes.

Ann Rice herself says: "My faith in Christ is central to my life. My conversion from a pessimistic atheist lost in a world I didn't understand, to an optimistic believer in a universe created and sustained by a loving God is crucial to me. But following Christ does not mean following his followers. Christ is infinitely more important than Christianity and always will be, no matter what Christianity is, has been, or might become."

Will we accept rejection?

Words from Wild Horses
Kenny Warkentin

The other day my wife and I were talking about gender identity and how to support those who continue to connect with us.

A statement that we often hear is "I do not feel safe to talk about my struggle at my Church," or, "they don't understand my issue."

Interestingly enough those statements resounded in my own heart as comments that I had used years earlier in my struggle with same gender attraction. I hid within the confines of those statements in fear that I would be rejected and tossed out of the Church, or worse, that those in the Church would just ignore me. Sadly, my experience was one of just ignoring the issue. I did talk about it and explain to my pastors that this is what I was dealing with. They referred me to a counselor, and, then, not another word was spoken regarding my struggle. No one asked how I was doing or journeyed through the hard stuff with me.

For years, I held that against the Church. How could they reject me in such a way; shun me with silence. The very thing that I needed to talk about was held in the quiet confines of "he appears to be doing better"; "the counselor will handle this situation." I began viewing the whole body of Christ through that experience – that the Church would not get this issue, nor would they be willing to walk with me or anyone else in a redemptive way.

Christ experienced rejection

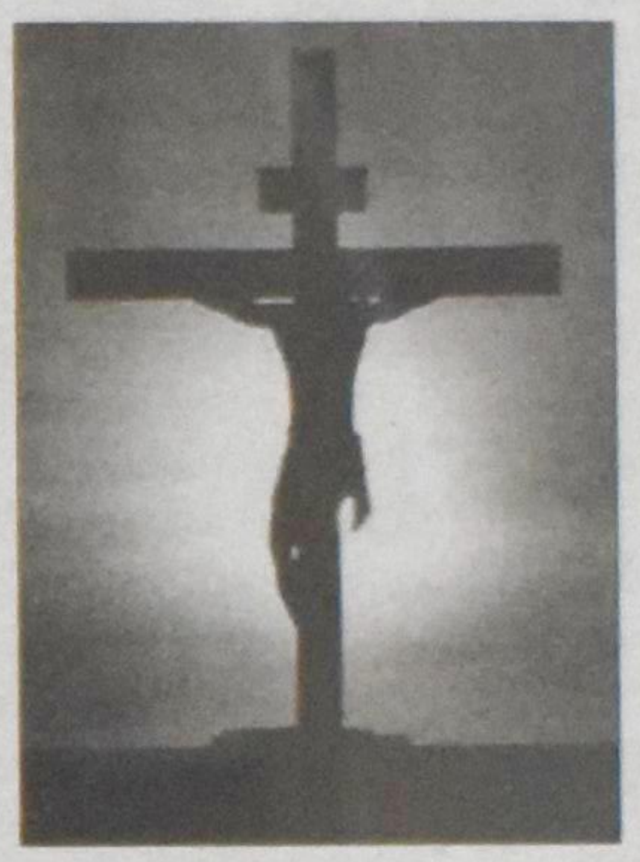
I have walked in a season of forgiveness, both for those who rejected me, but also for my own sinful responses. After my wife and I talked, I sat and meditated on how the Lord has moved in my life and redeemed my sexual identity. I meditated on Jesus. How he was rejected, and I felt as if the Lord was giving me new statements to think about.

For those struggling with same gender attraction and who are afraid of the reactions from those in the Church, are you willing to be open regardless of what people will say or do? Are you willing to talk, even if you are faced with a brick wall of a non-response? Are you afraid that you will be rejected?

Maybe I should say, are you WILLING to be rejected? Are you willing to be misunderstood? Are you willing to press on despite what others will say?

I felt as if I heard Christ say that he was willing to be misunderstood and rejected, and that he pressed on despite what others said about him. Often times I have heard and I have even shared how I felt as if no one understood the struggle I faced, and, yet, Christ knew it first hand. He felt everything that I felt. Why did he feel the same things? He felt it so that I would know that he understands me, even when the world doesn't. He did it all for me, for us.

As Christ hung from the cross he spoke, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"



Was Christ saying this so that we could better grasp that even he felt forsaken? Even he felt as if God did not hear him? How often in my journey of same gender attraction did I feel as if God was silent? When I prayed for him to take away the desires and nothing happened I felt forsaken, and, yet, God was intimately listening and speaking to me. I just didn't understand his voice. Even as Christ felt forsaken, he continued his journey on the cross. He was willing to not give in and conform to the cultural influences of his day.

How willing are we?

As humans we can aspire to be Christ-like (we will never be Christ), and emulate a life that is similar to how Christ lived and breathed. As we seek to be "Christ-like" are we willing to not give in to the pressures to conform to the cultural definition of sexuality that says you're just born this way and you cannot change? Will we believe the lie that Christ cannot redeem our sexual identity and that, instead, he embraces us as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgendered people? Will you believe that Christ's power is inefficient to do it? Or will you believe that in Christ all things are possible for those who believe? Will you trust a Father who is willing to do whatever it takes to draw you unto himself, so that you would worship him and him alone?

Are you willing to press on despite those who do not understand? Who may reject you and say you are foolish and not being true to the real you? For as I see it, just as I was afraid to share about my struggle with same gender attraction while in the body of Christ, there are now people who are just as afraid to step back into the journey out of homosexuality because of what the world around them is saying. I believe the Lord is asking each individual if they are willing to take a step and see what he, the redeemer of all things, can and will do, if we would only take the first step.

Kenny Warkentin (paintpent@mts.net) is an avid blogger, thinker and artist.

Why agriculture needs vibrant cities

John Clement

Jane Jacobs was a prolific author who wrote extensively about the economies of cities and the regions that supply them. Her main idea regarding economics is that cities, rather than nations, are the base of economic development and that regions outside of cities have their destinies determined by the vibrancy of those cities.

According to Jacobs, a dynamic city integrates its hinterland and becomes a full-blown "city region" with more money for infrastructure, technology and innovation in the city region's outlying rural areas. However, as one travels further afield from cities and their nearby hinterlands, the regions become less dynamic and narrowly specialized in the production of a more limited amount of goods.

Finally, Jacobs says that the markets in "city regions" for agricultural products become enormously diversified over time, in contrast to markets in more far-flung regions. She says that, in the aggregate, city regions produce amply and diversely for the region's own people as well as for others.

A huge city region

In short, Jacobs is telling those in agriculture that there are more opportunities when farming closer to dynamic cities than there is further away in a region that stretches for hundreds of miles with few cities. Jacobs' ideas are not without controversy, but by and large, my observations regarding the southern and eastern parts of Ontario would suggest that her theories are probably correct.

Ontario is one long series of cities stretching from Windsor to Ottawa, with the metropolis of Toronto situated squarely in the middle. As a result, most of the southern and eastern areas of the province serve as a huge "city region" for this dynamic series of urban areas. And within it, you find an area blessed with hundreds of agricultural commodities, serving customers both here and abroad. Some of it can be attributed to good soils and a temperate climate, but the overwhelming pull of nearby cities creates a huge amount of diversity in the production of goods and services.

All in all, dynamic cities create an ever-changing market for agricultural goods. And while it can be disruptive, it also creates opportunities for those who can identify new or changing markets and coordinate supply.

Farmers do indeed feed cities.

But if Jacobs is correct in her observations, farmers also need cities – and hopefully close by.

John Clement is the General Manager of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. The CFFO Commentary is heard weekly on CFCO Chatham, CKNX Wingham, Ontario and is archived on the CFFO website: www.christianfarmers.org. CFFO is supported by 4,353 family farmers across Ontario.

Flowers & Thistles

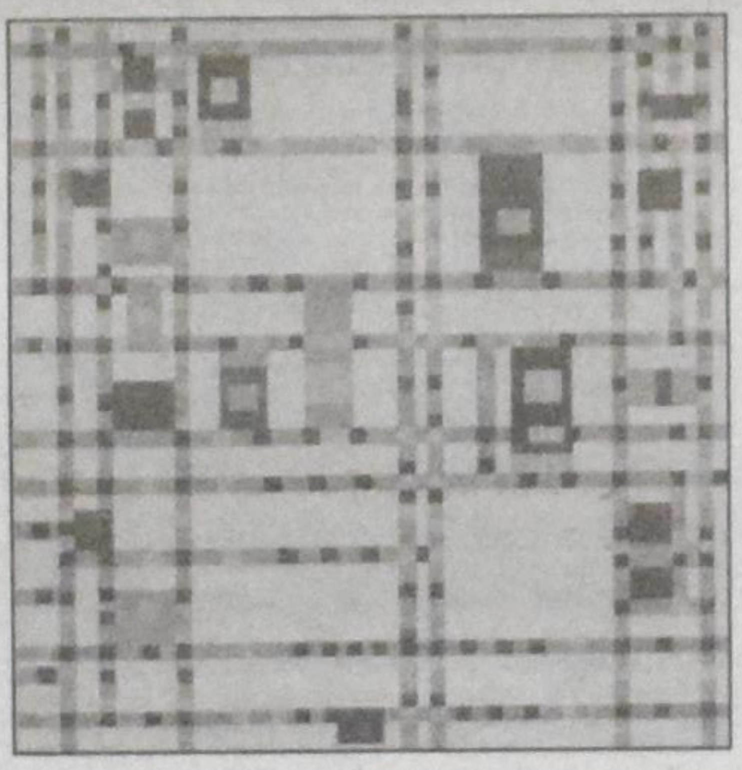
Curt Gesch

I got rhythm

"I Got Rhythm," wrote Ira Gershwin to brother George's tune. I'm pretty sure that the Gershwins had syncopation in mind, or maybe hemiola (told that he used a lot of hemiola, jazz composer Dave Brubeck is supposed to have replied that the term sounded like a rare blood disease suffered by Spanish royalty). Or, maybe they just had in mind music with "swing" – in which straight eighth notes are played as if they were dotted and flagged or triplets.

Say "rhythm" and lots of people think of hip-hop dancers or the television show, *So You Think You Can Dance*. Others think of West African drummers.

One of the recent popes espoused "rhythm" as the only acceptable method of birth control. (He supplied the sceptics and wags with lots of opportunities for slightly off-colour jokes.)



One can see visual rhythm in Mondrian's famous painting, "Broadway Boogie-Woogie" (see illustration). At first the painting seems an abstract, but after watching *CSI New York* with its overhead shots of Manhattan streets, you can get a sense of what the painter was thinking about. The squares and rectangles and colours suggest a sort of urban ostinato, the busy pace, and the, well, *rhythm* of that financial metropolis.

It's in this last sense of the word that I sense rhythm all around me.

I participate in the rhythm of the seasons: seed-time and harvest may be different in the Mid-East,than in British Columbia, but God's promise of the pulse of life strikes a clear bell-tone and rhythmic undercurrent to life all over this earth: "seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night."

Days have a rhythm to them, or used to. Breakfast, lunch, dinner. Chores, homework, TV time. Chores, homework, tinkering with an engine (or catching a trout or reading in a comfortable chair).

People old enough to remember these things tell me that the psh-psh of milk hitting the milk-pail when everyone milked by hand had a certain soothing character that partly compensated for shitty tails hitting you in the face and cramped hands or wrists.

Later, the pulse of milking machines, either portable units or modern line-milking systems, lent a certain foundational consolation to what can be a daily chore that sometimes seems inexorable in its demands.

*****

People mess with the rhythms of earthly life and God-ordained humanity at their peril. In early industrial times, extracting work from employees seemed the most efficient way to get things done. Until, that is, sociological studies of the workplace showed that when workers followed a work/coffee break/work/lunch rhythm, efficiency actually increased. That "down time" was key to efficiency because, I believe, it respected the way humans are made.

One can argue with biblical imprimatur that the cycle of work/Sabbath is fundamental to creational health. Fields need their fallow; humans their home; work gets its due, and rest gets it, too. Sanctifying the Sabbath means not only the fourth commandment, but also the first. One sanctifies the Creator-Redeemer by honouring his ways. Those who turn the Sabbath into one more busy day of fishing, skiing, or non-stop pleasure pay the penalty in frazzled nerves and frantic lives while they try to compensate for communal worship with creating replacement communities of cyclists, consumers, or "life-styles". They need worship, rest, and *koinonia*.

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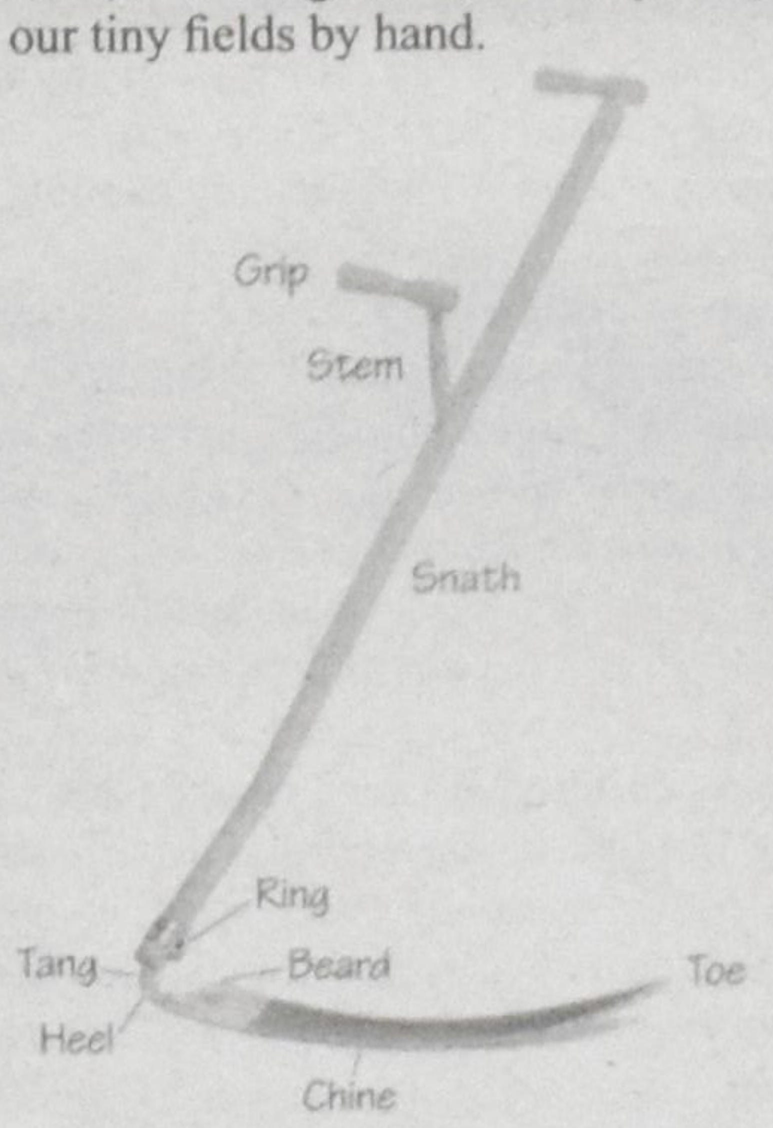
Recently, my wife and I have discovered the rhythm of hay-making. We've "put up" several small piles of oat hay that I planted by hand. Now, with the grain in the dough stage, we thought we'd try to harvest our tiny fields by hand.



Enter the scythe. It's a weird, twisted tool with handles and blade and equally strange names for the parts. A scythe consists of a *snath*, a *grip*, a *stem*, a *tang*, a *heel*, a *ring*, a *beard*, a *chine*, and a *toe*. Before you can *hone* your scythe, you should *peen* it.

My patient neighbour, Steffen, showed me how to peen his scythe, then honed it with a whetstone kept in a water-filled cow horn strapped to his waist. He proceeded to show me how to do the deed. Steffen can mow a lawn with a scythe.

As for me, I must have looked like an orangutan trying to play a violin (to quote Balzac, not quite out of context). Eventually, I learned to handle my own posture more appropriately. I kept the heel down, made shorter "bites," and was able to leave the oats in something that sort-of resembled a windrow. One night when I was cutting a very thin part of the oat field, I realized that somehow or another I had achieved a rhythm. My right foot was forward, I had a back swing, a decent trajectory, and I could – almost without effort – leave my tiny swath and make the shuffle to get the next bite.

Elliot Fishbein (www.scythesupply.com) answers the question: "Why use a scythe" [in an age of power tools and massive machines]? Part of Fishbein's answer is this: "The rhythmic cutting motion does not have to be stressful. Its patterns can be dance-like and relaxing. There is therapy in this kind of mindful exercise. You are both entertained and rewarded by this labour. This is kinetic meditation."

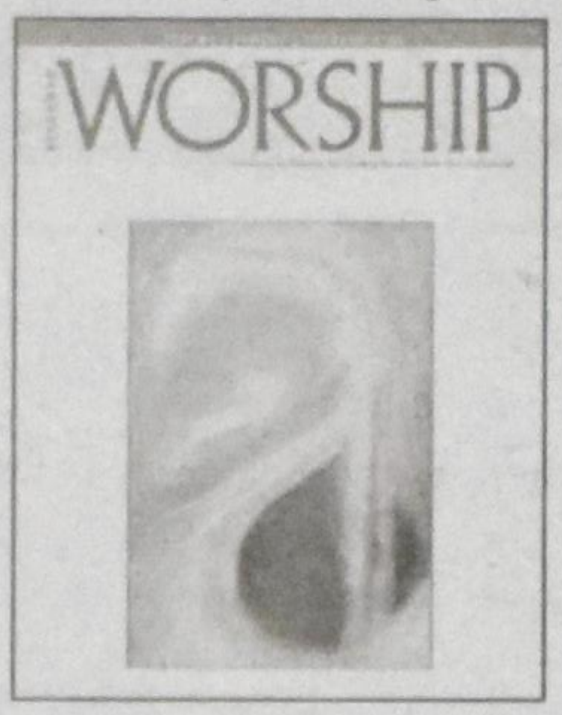
May we all have a restful, rhythmic life.

Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) *is an amateur scyther who has passed Scything Pre-school, but is finding Scything Kindergarten more difficult. He lives in Quick, B.C.*

Psalm singing is on the rise

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – Singing the Psalms, a tradition that had fallen out of favor in some churches in lieu of using "contemporary" praise music, is starting to make a resurgence, according to worship leaders quoted in a series of articles in the most recent issue of *Reformed Worship*. That resurgence is evident not only in Reformed churches but in many Christian denominations, including the Roman Catholic Church.

Published by Faith Alive Christian Resources, the publishing ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, *Reformed Worship* is geared toward planning and leading worship. The most recent issue is devoted entirely to the topic of why psalm-singing should be part of worship, and how that can be done if it isn't already part of a congregation's worship. Many examples of how to use the Psalms in worship are included, and many materials from the magazine are available on its website.



"Psalm singing is not a dying tradition but a revived one," writes Joyce Borger, editor of *Reformed Worship*. She says, "I am only one person out of a growing body of Christians for whom the psalms are gaining importance."

The state of the world, especially after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, subsequent wars, and a range of natural disasters all seem to have played a role in bringing people back to the Psalms with their direct approach to questioning God about a world that has gone awry. For those who had ignored the Psalms – which Jesus often quoted – "our eyes have been opened and worship leaders have scrambled to find the right words of lament, of comfort, of assurance to utter in our services," Borger says.

Breaks through self-absorbed mentality

In contemporary culture, church is often seen as part of the consumer movement. People attend a certain church because its style and programs fit the perceived "needs" of attendees. But the Psalms break through the mentality that focuses on individual preferences and needs and they "become a rock for us – a true, objective, and honest expression of human frailty and relationship with God," writes Marty Haugen, a well-known liturgical composer, workshop presenter and performing and recording artist. "They are unchanging and faithful texts in a rapidly changing world."

The Psalms, many of them written by King David, have been subject to a kind of worship war, pitting them against modern, upbeat, often rock-style music. "Until we start praying, reading, and singing through the Psalms again, we will continue to find ourselves at war when it comes to worship," writes Brian Moss, worship and music coordinator for Regent College in Vancouver, B.C. "These are the front lines of the 'worship wars' – not a style or tradition, or contemporary or convergent, or whatever – but learning to worship God in the fullness of our humanity."

Granite Springs is a Christian Reformed Home Missions "church plant" in the upscale suburb of Lincoln, California. Until the recent recession the community was affluent. There were expensive cars in every driveway, spacious homes, well-watered and manicured lawns. But the recession hit the area hard. During the accompanying mortgage crisis property values plummeted while mortgage payments remained high. At the time, Granite Springs was in the middle of spending a year hearing sermons about, studying and singing the Psalms. The heartfelt cries to God in the Psalms, the depth of expression and the opportunity to talk intimately with God about hard things helped people cope with the crisis.

"The Psalms urge us to pray the mess of our emotions as an act of faith. The ancient voices offer wise guides for worship," writes Rev. Kevin Adams, pastor of Granite Springs. "Almost a third of the Psalms are laments. Suffering people beg God for rescue or relief."

Petra Verwijs, a Hebrew Bible scholar, grew up in a Reformed Psalm-singing church in the Netherlands. "The psalms, I learned, are all about a shared human condition. Singing them helped me listen to others…. The Psalms enable God's people to stand with each other in the depths and heights of their lives," she writes. "The Psalms help us to take our eyes off of ourselves and to pay attention to the created world in all of its glory. They are comprised of words and images that speak to our deepest longings and allow people to sing and pray songs of profound distress as well as affirmation."

"Why are we, as 21st century humans, so slow to recognize creation's capacity to praise God directly? And what are the theological and ecological consequences of our blindness?" asks Carol Bechtel, moderator for the General Synod Council for the Reformed Church in America.

North Korea arrests, executes Christians

SEOUL, South Korea (AsiaNews) – When North Korea's Stalinist regime discovered 23 underground Christians in a house church in Pyongan Province, all 23 were arrested. Far worse, three were sentenced to death and swiftly executed, sources told AsiaNews. Confirmation of the incident also came from the North Korea Intellectual Solidarity, a group of North Korean exiles.

According to the sources, the arrests and executions were carried out in mid-May. "At that time, right after the disastrous currency reform, police discovered 23 Christians in Kuwal-dong, Pyungsung County, in Pyongan Province, who met at an underground church. After their arrest, they were interrogated at length. The group's "ringleaders" were sentenced to death and executed. The others were sent to Kwan-li-so (penal labour colony) No. 15 in Yodŏk."

"As the authorities fear the spread of religion, many area residents are rounded up and interrogated for days," the sources said. However, "they cannot help it because the situation is so desperate that people are going back to religion. Such sentences are meant to scare people."

North Korea denies freedom of religion absolutely. Officially, the country has three Christian places of worship (one Catholic and two Protestant churches) and four Buddhist temples, but only in the capital Pyongyang. No one has been able to confirm how many exist in the rest of the country. Accounts about their number by foreigners who have travelled around the country vary.

The one cult allowed is that of "Eternal President" Kim Il-sung and his son, the "Dear Leader" Kim Jong-il. After the Korean War in 1953, the Stalinist regime ruthlessly killed the country's estimated 200,000 Catholics and destroyed their churches and abbeys. They then did the same with Protestants and their churches.

Traditional Canadian Anglicans vote to unite with Rome

VANCOUVER (CNA) – With "overwhelming support," a recent meeting of leaders in the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada (ACCC) voted to unite with the Roman Catholic Church through the Apos-tolic Constitution created by Pope Benedict XVI.

The ACCC, part of the Continuing Anglican Movement, is made up of more than two dozen congregations. Its 8th provincial synod and 13th diocesan synod were held simultaneously at the Rosemary Heights Retreat Center in Surrey, B.C. The meeting was attended by four ACCC bishops as well as by Archbishop John Hepworth, the Australia-based Primate of the Traditional Anglican Communion (TAC).

Support for implementing a "Canadian Anglican Catholic Ordinariate" under the Roman Catholic Apostolic Constitution was unanimous. The necessary canonical ordinances and rules to establish the Ordinariate were then approved.

Dean Shane Janzen of the ACCC wrote on the website <www.VirtueOnline.org> that the focus of the synod was "the worship and praise of Almighty God; the proclamation of Christ's saving Truth; and faithful witness to the faith, order and discipline to Christ's one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church." Janzen reported that attendees left with "a renewed sense of optimism for the future and a clear vision for the present."

Follow-up:
Toronto priest who gave dog Communion apologizes – sort of

TORONTO (CNA) – An Anglican female priest has apologized for offering communion to a dog after the incident added to further tensions within the Anglican Church of Canada.

Last month Donald Keith, 56, took his dog, a German Shepherd-Rhodesian Ridgeback crossbreed, into St. Peter's Anglican Church in Toronto where interim priest Marguerite Rea was officiating. The man and his dog frequent the park outside the church. Keith had never been in the church before and admitted he had no conception of the meaning of Communion. He thought the priest's action was "very innocent."

Rea welcomed man and dog inside and offered communion to both. A parishioner – who has since left the congregation – filed a formal complaint with Bishop Patrick Yu of the Toronto Diocese of the Anglican Church of Canada (ACC).

Rea has now apologized to anyone "who may have been hurt or embarrassed by her actions" but refused to speak to or apologize for her startlingly unorthodox understanding of the Eucharist. She merely said her gesture was a way of welcoming a stranger.

However, Cheryl Chang, chancellor of the biblically orthodox Anglican Network in Canada (made up of parishes which have left the ACC), said, "Communion to a dog is not something that will ever happen to our, or any Bible-believing, Christian church anywhere in the world."

Interim priest Rea is refusing further comment. "The incident is done; it's over…. I am not going to discuss anything about it."

Italian bishop to Mafia: Stay away from churches – unless you repent

ROME (CatholicCulture) – Bishop Giuseppe Fiorini Morosini of Locri-Gerace, Italy, has called upon Mafia leaders to cease the practice of holding initiation ceremonies at Catholic shrines and chapels.

Reacting to the release of police videotapes showing a Mafia initiation at a Marian shrine near Reggio Calabria, the bishop released an open letter to the Mafia condemning the use of religious shrines for criminal purposes. He included the observation that if Mafia figures would amend their ways, the church is "always willing to welcome you with open arms because it is the only institution that believes in the possibility of your conversion."

Education

School gardeners perform better in the classroom

Mark Jewsbury and Jonathan Owen

GOOLE, Yorkshire, UK – Briony Coolledge is enthusiastic about math these days. But ask her about her new-found fondness for the subject and she will enthuse about the fun she had planting and measuring the metre-squared raised seed beds in her school garden. "I love sowing the seeds," the 10-year-old says. "I love watching them grow. I especially enjoyed planting the vegetables. I love working outside and it's great fun when you eat things such as raspberries and strawberries."

Briony is a pupil at Kingsway Primary School in Goole, Yorkshire, where the school garden has flourished as part of *The Independent on Sunday's* "Let Children Grow" campaign. The garden is "embedded into the curriculum," Liam Jackson, the school's head teacher says. "Once we got them outside we found they were engaging more. Teaching English is key, and we have made a lot of use of the garden, especially with creative writing. We have had the children keeping a diary and writing about being lost in the garden."

Another student, Anne-Marie Preston, 10, says, "Being outside is fantastic, much more fun than being in class. I love learning about the outdoors." Finley Dance, also 10, like agrees it is fun, but the educational value has not escaped him. "I had heard people talk about sowing a seed, but I didn't know what it was until I did it myself," he explains.

A new study backs *The Independent's* campaign, which aims to get all primary schools in the UK to provide some practical gardening for children.

Boosts development

Research by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) reveals that school gardens boost children's development. Gardening helps teach life skills and makes children healthier and happier. The study of 1,300 teachers and 10 schools also highlights the ways school gardening increases the willingness of children to eat a wider range of vegetables and fruit.

"Work in the garden was frequently reported as an instrument to improve children's self-esteem, particularly for those who lacked confidence and self-belief," the report states. Simon Thornton-Wood, RHS director of science and learning, says that gardening in schools "has transformed their whole learning environment."

Over the next three years the RHS intends to train 4,500 teachers in how to integrate gardening into their school curriculum. At present, only one in four primary teachers uses gardening to teach.

British television gardener and writer Alan Titchmarsh approves. He says, "From the minute my grandfather took me to his allotment, I was hooked. Watching how plants grew and getting my hands dirty brought fun and learning together. Gardening at school brings benefits every child should get the chance to enjoy."

Follow-up:

Fired Catholic prof reinstated at University of Illinois

CHAMPAIGN, Illinois (CNA/EWTN News) – A University of Illinois professor who was recently fired for explaining Catholic teaching on homosexuality will be reinstated. Dr. Kenneth Howell's position was terminated at the end of the spring semester after he taught in a class on Catholicism that the Roman Catholic Church believes homosexual behavior violates natural law.

A letter from the U. of I. Office of University Counsel told Howell's lawyers at the Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) that he would once again be given the opportunity to teach Religion 127, "Introduction to Catholicism," next fall as an adjunct professor, as he has in the past.

Howell had taught at the university since 2001 and was consistently given high ratings on student evaluations. But in a class on Catholicism last spring he followed up a classroom discussion with an e-mail contrasting the ways in which utilitarianism and natural-law theory would each determine the morality of homosexual conduct.

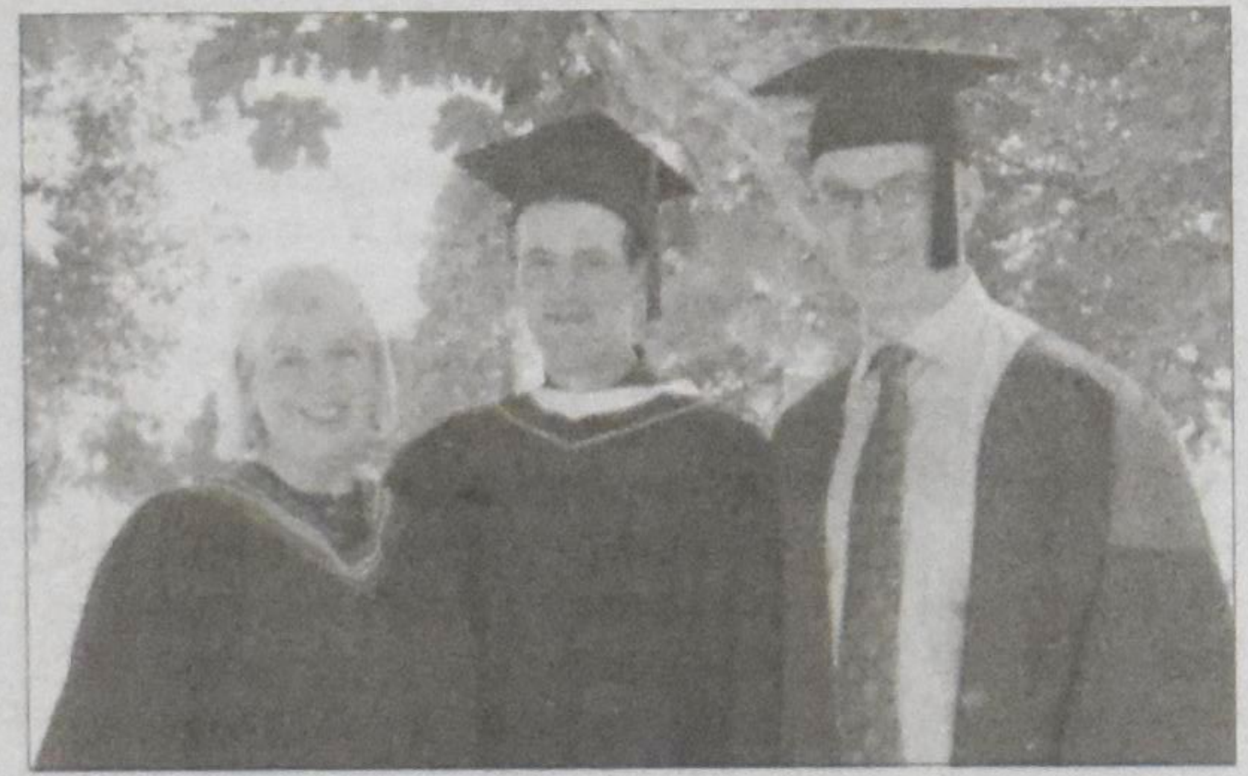
A student complained in an e-mail to the head of the religion department that Howell's words were "hate speech." Howell was subsequently told that he had to quit teaching because his e-mail "violated university standards of inclusivity."

In defending Howell the ADF declared that the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution exists to keep controversial ideas from being suppressed. "A university cannot censor professors' speech – including classroom speech related to the topic of the class – merely because certain ideas 'offend' an anonymous student," argued ADF senior counsel David French.

"We greatly appreciate the university's move to put Professor Howell back in the classroom," he said, "but we will be watching carefully to make sure that his academic freedom is protected throughout the university's ongoing process."

Redeemer grad receives hefty scholarship

ANCASTER, Ontario (RUC/Emily Williams) – Redeemer University College graduate Joel Faber (2010) has received a Canada Graduate Scholarship worth $17,500. He will take a master's degree in English at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia.



Joel Faber (c.) with two English faculty members: his father, Dr. Benne Faber (r.) and Dr. Deborah Bowen.

The Canada Graduate Scholarship is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRCC). The council describes itself as seeking "to develop research skills and assist in the training of highly qualified personnel by supporting students in the social sciences and humanities who demonstrate a high standard of achievement in undergraduate and early graduate studies."

An applicant for the scholarship "must have achieved a first-class average, as determined by his or her university, in each of the last two years of full-time study." It was judged that Faber's academic ability and his education at Redeemer made him well-qualified for the SSHRCC scholarship.

Princeton Review names colleges with 'most religious' students

PRINCETON, N.J. (ChristianPost) – For the second year in a row, post-secondary students at a well-known Mormon university, Catholic college and evangelical college were named the "most religious" among students at faith-based colleges and universities in the U.S.

Brigham Young University, Thomas Aquinas College and Wheaton College (Billy Graham's *alma mater*) are the academic institutions whose students were considered "most religious." Calvin College students came in at No.12 on that list.

Doing the naming was the *Princeton Review*, an American-based standardized test preparation and admissions consulting company which has offices in 41 American states and 22 countries across the globe.

Based on a survey of 122,000 students at 373 of the "best" colleges in the U.S., the *Princeton Review's* new lists report the top 20 colleges in 62 categories ranging from those related to academics and demographics to those related to politics and the quality of life. Among the most notable are "Most Conservative Students," "Most Liberal Students," "LGBT (lesbian-gay-bi-transexual)-Friendly," "Top Stone-Cold Sober Schools" and "Happiest Students," among others.

"Each of our 373 best colleges offers great academics and we salute them for that," remarked Robert Franek, senior vice president and publisher of the *Princeton Review* and author of *The Best 373 Colleges*. "However," he added, "they differ widely in their program offerings and campus culture."

About 'finding your best fit'

"That's why we don't rank them 1-373," Franek continued. Instead we tally 62 ranking lists based entirely on how students at these schools rated their [own] experiences at them. We also compile eight rating scores for each school based on our institutional research. For applicants, it's all about finding your best fit college."

According to the *Princeton Review*, the happiest students were found on the campus of Brown University in Rhode Island; the most conservative were at Texas A&M; and the most politically active were at American University in Washington, D.C. The most liberal, meanwhile, were found on the campus of Hampshire College in Massachusetts; the most LGBT-friendly at Emerson College in Massachusetts; and the least religious at Sarah Lawrence College in Yonkers, New York, just north of Manhattan.

To determine its rankings, the *Princeton Review* had students fill out an 80-question survey about their academic institution's academics, administration, campus life, student body and themselves. The average number of students surveyed per campus was 325. Surveys included for the rankings were taken during the 2009-10 and/or previous two school years. The entire list, plus 61 other lists, can be found at <www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings.aspx>.

Short Story

CC proudly presents the winners of our short story contest!

Eva's desperate measures

Linda Lensink

There was a naked body at the corner of Eastchester and Queenston Street. Eva was doing her best to cover it up.

She had planned the thing with a doggedness unlike her usual languid style. She had searched online to determine the projection distance she might achieve. On the weekend she had parked at the site, eyeballing the distances and plotting the optimal location from which to take her shot. She knew such weapons were available in St Cätharines, but it seemed more do-able in the States so Eva made a little expedition over the border. She considered going to Wal-Mart for her purchases knowing they carried a range of products of a higher caliber, but her scruples wouldn't allow that and she had gone to K-Mart instead. The young salesman with shaggy hair had shaken his head, had likely rolled his eyes, as Eva walked away with her purchase. Her questions had revealed her ignorance of the weapons, especially the merits of the Constant Pressure System as opposed to the MaxD. She had chosen the MaxD. Eva had never expected that she would even consider the course of action she was now embarking upon. Simon, her husband, would be shocked.

She had gone to the beach earlier that week. As she expected, there was almost no one there on a Wednesday morning. She brought her books and a low sling chair. She didn't really know if she planned to read. It seemed necessary to bring the books because it didn't seem right – no, maybe it was that it didn't look right – to plunk oneself somewhere and do nothing, not even on the beach. She had too many clothes on to look like she was tanning, and she was too old and too married to go to the beach to "see and be seen." Eva wanted to do nothing in a nice place. She needed the serenity and the agelessness of the waves and the sun and the sand. She closed her eyes and felt the warm sun on her eyelids; she dug her toes into the sand and enjoyed its cool wet counterpoint.

Funny how, as a teenager, she had loved to read and hadn't given it a thought; she read all the time: on the beach, on the subway, on all of her breaks at school and work. And no one ever made her doubt that she was a fascinating person – quite the opposite. But she knew if she were to read now on the beach she would look nondescript, boring. She would look bookish. People didn't see her as person worth knowing anymore.

Her children were the worst offenders. That was what brought her to the beach that Wednesday morning. She needed those waves. Her children couldn't see that she was a real person with ideas and personality. Just the night before, it had gone badly when she talked to Emily about her piano recital.

"Mom," Emily had said, "of course you think I played well. You have to. You're a mom."

"Emily, I may be a mom, and I may be your mom, but I know a sensitively played piece of music when I hear one. You played very expressively, and you looked composed and beautiful."

"Mom, just don't bother saying anything when you don't know what you're talking about." And she left the room.

She had heard that line, or variations of it with increasing frequency as both she and her children had gotten older. And it wasn't just about piano playing, which admittedly, she didn't really know much about. Her daughters believed that she was some kind of pre-programmed automated mom-aton. Eva began to wish she had brought an umbrella to the beach. The sunshine was wonderful, but too much is just too much. Being a mom and being forty-five meant that none of your thoughts were interesting, original or worthwhile.

After noon, more sun seekers arrived, slathered themselves with tanning oil and reclined, glistening on towels. Two girls about Emily's age stretched themselves out a few feet away from Eva. They talked nonstop about everything, about calculus, eyeliner, someone named Jamie Fogerty, about Facebook and waxing. Eva found them fascinating, beautiful and so typical of teenagers. How amazing that they could be so unaware of their own smooth beauty, taking it for granted even as they obsessed over their appearance. She wished she could tell them they were beautiful but she knew they would misunderstand. She knew they wouldn't realize that their beauty was like the sand and the sun and the waves, that it was a part of all creation and didn't belong to them. She knew they would think she was demented or dangerous. Probably both.

She thought of those girls and of Emily on her drive back home. As she stopped at the light by the new Communications Building, waiting to make a right hand turn, Eva experienced again a phenomenon that she had noticed every time she had come to this intersection in the last two months. She was unable to keep herself from focusing on the billboard above the variety store at the far corner. She was riveted. Once again. Apparently she had no choice; her eyes were drawn, inevitably, every time she passed by, to the image of that elegant airbrushed woman, lounging alluringly with a cell phone at her ear. She had sold her smooth beauty to a cell phone company and now Eva, and every one else who passed by, was captured. Even the girls on the beach looked ho-hum compared with that. Eva thought about Simon. She thought about her own forty-five year old physique. How could Simon's whispers that she was beautiful be true when his eyes, even more that hers, must be dragged to this sight every single day. She thought of her neighbours and their sons and husbands, and even more, their daughters. She thought unkind thoughts about the ad execs working long hours in the Communications Building.

She began to hatch the plan that led to all the research and the purchases and the reconnaissance. At one in the morning on Monday night Eva intended to slip out of bed. She hoped to be back within the hour. Simon needn't know.

The bedroom, even in the dead of night, was illuminated. The blinds on the window and on the balcony door couldn't block out the floodlights the apartment building next door shone at all hours onto their parking lot. Eva didn't mind the light, though. The bedroom had high ceilings, and the dark mahogany of the old wooden doors and their four-poster bed looked both homey and elegant in the dim light. Eva, so conscious of her plan to go out alone into the night, lingered some minutes, disinclined to relinquish the comfort of the smooth cotton sheets against her skin, the luxury of her pillow and the sound of Simon breathing beside her.

The pale yellow walls, the flamboyant colours of the duvet, muted now in the weak light, the pure white of the sheets spoke to Eva of the contentment of home, her home. In the stillness, unsure whether she could return unhindered once she left, Eva was reluctant to leave the sanctity of this room and this bed, the place where she had nursed her children, where she had nestled like spoons with Simon, where they had talked long hours over their worries, where they had given their bodies and their selves to each other.

But the thing had to be done. She threw back the cover and squeezed soundlessly past the partly open door. She knew that its hinges would squawk their usual protest if she moved the door so much as an inch. The house was cool and quiet. The hardwood stairs complained loudly in the stillness and Eva's breathing seemed clamourous in the quiet too.

She parked her black Mazda 5 in the little lot at the variety store below the huge lighted billboard. She glanced up at the image and, ignoring the red light, crossed the deserted street towards her chosen location amongst the shrubs at The Eastchester Rest Home.

It was serendipitous that the Home was so conveniently located at the site of Eva's mission. The yard there was often populated with derelict residents out for a smoke or perhaps a brief reprieve from the dismal inside air. At one in the morning, though, she counted on having the place to herself and her target. Eva was wearing Simon's dark green and navy housecoat. It was perfect – dark enough for camouflage and shabby enough not to look out of place if she was spotted there on the Rest Home lawn.

The area was as deserted as she had hoped. She could feel and hear the blood pumping through her ears as she strained to listen for sounds of approach. She wandered with a studied nonchalance towards her chosen spot, stood by the bench as if about to light a cigarette, and then when she was confident there was not a single witness anywhere, she squatted abruptly into the bushes. She removed the loaded MaxD from her bag. She looked over at the billboard with the alluring woman, naked, selling herself for the cell phone company. Still her ears were pounding.

Eva pumped her loaded MaxD and aimed. Again and again, she pumped, aimed, and showered that beautiful body until it was almost covered, until she could see only the honey colored hair and a pair of elegant feet.

Then she relaxed. She leaned her back against the stone bench. She tipped her head back to look at the stars. She almost wished she was a smoker. It would have been the perfect thing to do. Her ears cleared and she heard the dripping. She knew it was black paint, paint she had thinned, maybe a little too much, dripping onto the roof of a car, her car. She grimaced and then decided that, yes, that seemed fair; it *was* vandalism. Vigilante vandalism in the dead of night.

2nd place winner

Linda Lensink.(llensink@beacon-christian.org) is a teacher living in St Catharines, Ontario and a member of Jubilee CRC.

Short Story

Poor sad soul

Jeannie Prinsen

"Could you get that, Katherine?" The Monday night game of hearts – a tradition for as long as Katherine could remember – was in full swing, and her mother didn't like to be distracted in the middle of a hand. Katherine had no interest in cards and didn't mind being receptionist for the evening, although, she thought wryly, her mother got more calls in a day than she got in a week. This time the caller, whose voice Katherine didn't recognize, was insistent, so her mother took the phone with apologies to her friends.

"That was Thelma," she said when she returned. "I guess poor Margaret MacMillan died last night."

"Is that right?" said Ruth Carter. "Well, that poor creature had quite the life. I'd call it a living death, these ten years."

"She was never the same after Michael got sent to the pen, that's sure," Katherine's mother said. "What that boy put her through. Broke her heart, you might as well say. No wonder she went clean off her rocker."

"Mom!" exclaimed Katherine. Her mother's bluntness could still shock her at times. "My God, the woman just died."

"Katherine, I'm not saying anything that anyone doesn't know," her mother replied. "Margaret MacMillan was always a strange bird, but after Michael got into that trouble she was odder than ever. Puttering around in that little house, never going anywhere but to the store, talking to herself all the way."

"Pitiful soul," Mary DeRoche said. "It's a sad case. Whose deal is it? I've lost track."

"You must have known Michael, Katherine," said Ruth. "Weren't you in school with him?"

"Not that he spent much time in school," Katherine's mother said. "Margaret never made much effort on that front."

"I think Ruth was asking me a question, Mom," Katherine said, turning toward Ruth, a warmhearted woman she had always liked. "He was two grades ahead of me so we were never in classes together. And he was kind of one of the wild ones so he didn't exactly hang out with me." But I remember him, Katherine thought. I remember at the school picnic, watching him swing out across the pond on a knotted rope and then leap into the water yelling, "Bombs away!" He was the handsomest boy I had ever seen. The last thought made her smile, considering she had not thought of Michael MacMillan in ten years.

"We can be thankful he didn't 'hang out' with you, as you put it," her mother said with emphasis. "You studied hard, never got into trouble, and you have a good job at the university."

"Teaching, are you, Katherine?" Ruth asked.

"Yes, English literature. I just finished my first year at it. I'm heading back Wednesday to get ready for the new semester."

"Well, teaching is a noble profession," Mary said. "It's your deal, Ruth, if you have the time. My land, Marion, that pumpkin loaf is lovely. I must get your recipe"

"Is there a wake?" Ruth asked, feathering the cards across the table.

"Not likely," Katherine's mother said. "Thelma thinks there'll be a service, though. We must all go pay our respects to the poor thing."

"Yes, we should certainly go," Lois Farmer said. "Imagine if no one went? My word, I hope when I pass, I won't have to wonder if anyone will come to my funeral."

"Don't worry, Lois, I'll come," said Ruth. "With bells on." Then, as the laughter subsided, "What's this hand – keepsies, is it? Ladies, play the hand you're dealt, and no bitching."

Katherine wandered through the kitchen and stepped out on the porch into the evening coolness. If she hadn't thought of Michael MacMillan in ten years, then it had been even longer since she had thought of his mother. Whatever recollection she did have was of a woman who had always seemed old. Mrs. MacMillan was small and wiry, with gray hair pulled up in a knot behind her head, always wearing the same steel-gray dress. She never seemed to talk to anyone or have friends like Katherine's mother did. There was no Mr. MacMillan either, just her and Michael, in a little tumbledown house on an unpaved street.

Mrs. MacMillan might have been a shadowy figure, but Michael always seemed to be in the news, especially when he got charged with murder. Katherine was at university when that happened, so she just heard it second-hand. She remembered her mother telling her on the phone about Michael's sentencing too, but she'd been working on a major paper that night and it hadn't made much of an impact on her.

Now, as she stood looking out through the darkness, she tried to imagine what it would be like to have a child who turned out that way. Maybe her mother was right: who could endure a thing like that without something giving way inside? She shivered.

"You're coming to the funeral too, of course," her mother said on Wednesday morning. "One o'clock."

"Mom, my train's at 2:05, and I can't miss it; I want to get back in time for the departmental barbecue. And it's not like I really know them or anything."

"Oh, you'll have time. I can't see it being a long service – what is there to say, after all? Come with me, and you can drive. I hate driving downtown."

It was a hot afternoon as they drove downtown to the Baptist church – "though I can't say I saw Margaret darken the door of the Baptist church recently, or any church for that matter," Katherine's mother remarked. As Katherine pulled up to the church, her mother rolled down her window. "There's Ruth. Yoo-hoo, Ruth, here we are. Isn't Lois with you?"

"Lois is up to her elbows making raspberry jam," Ruth said. "She said to sign her name in the book anyway, though."

"I'm surprised the service is here," Katherine's mother mused as they walked across the parking lot.

"Well, I hear she was cremated," Ruth replied, "so the funeral home didn't have to be involved. I suppose that cuts down on the cost."

"It'll be a cold day in Hades before I'm cremated." Then, clutching Katherine's arm, her mother pointed toward a dark blue Corrections van parked by the church steps. "Lord, Michael himself must be here. This should be quite something. What a sorrowful situation." Yet she sounded surprisingly enthusiastic.

They entered the church and were ushered to a pew. There were at least fifty people present; Lois's worries had apparently been unfounded. From her seat towards the back Katherine couldn't see anyone at the front whom she could pick out as Michael MacMillan.

The service was conducted by Rev. Allen, the Baptist minister. The Scripture and hymn were predictable: "The Lord is my Shepherd" and "Amazing Grace" respectively. Then the minister rose to deliver the homily.

"At times such as these," he said, his gaze sweeping across the congregation, "we confess it can be difficult to find hope amid what was surely a life of great heartbreak. But the Book of Revelation comforts us with these words about our heavenly dwelling: 'He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.' This is the consolation our merciful God offers to those who are brought low by sorrow and calamity. We can rest in the knowledge that Mrs. MacMillan's suffering is, at last, at an end."

Katherine felt a cringe of discomfort and shifted in her seat, but everyone else in the church seemed to be listening serenely. She stole a glance at her mother, who shook her head and whispered, "What a shame."

After the homily, the only other thing on the program was "Closing Prayer." Throughout the church women were already reaching for their purses, and men were folding up programs in their pockets or handing them to their wives.

Suddenly at the front of the church, two men rose and spoke quietly to the minister. After a moment's hesitation, Rev. Allen stepped to the microphone and said stiffly, "Mrs. MacMillan's son Michael wishes to say a few words at this time." The rustling in the church stopped, and the two men stepped onto the platform and turned to face those assembled.

Katherine wondered why she had thought she would recognize Michael MacMillan. There was nothing of the boy he had been: the wild-haired, brash youth that she, being younger, remembered as tall. He was much thinner and shorter than she had expected; perhaps the dark suit, slightly too large, created that effect. His head was shaved and his scalp was shockingly white, making his dark eyes seem small and sunken.

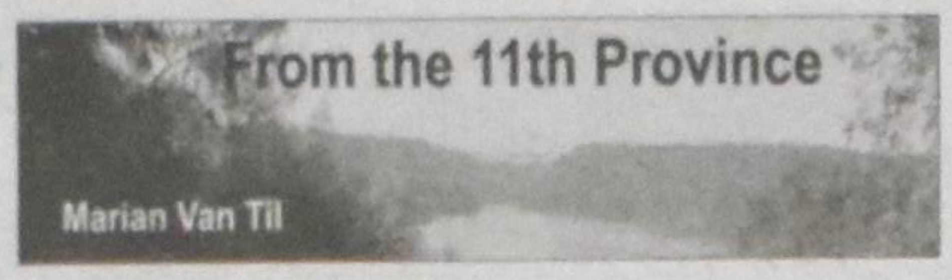
The other man was bearded, wearing glasses and a suit jacket and jeans. His voice was quiet but firm. "Good afternoon. I'm Greg Gallant; I'm a chaplain at the institution. Thank you for coming today, it means a lot to see so many people. Michael has a few words he'd like to say and has asked me to assist him."

To Katherine, it was as if the entire roomful of people were holding their collective breath – it was so silent in that church. Rev. Allen was sitting immobile, staring so hard at Michael MacMillan that he seemed to be trying to put a spell on him. But Michael spoke, and Katherine felt a jolt of recognition; there was the Michael of old, his voice that odd combination of husky and high-pitched. He looked and sounded extremely nervous. "Uh, as Chaplain Greg said, thank you for coming out today to pay your respects to my mother. She was a wonderful woman." He paused and then breathed deeply. "As you likely all know, I was not the best son to her. I got into a lot of trouble. I know I broke her heart," he said, his voice shaking. "But I never forgot my mother. She wrote to me a lot at the prison but since I never learned to read too good,

Continued on page 12

1st place winner

Jeannie Prinsen (jandrprinsen@kos.net) was born in PEI and now lives in Kingston, Ontario with her husband and two children, aged 11 and 7. She is a tutor and the instructor of a correspondence essay-writing course at Queen's University. She has always liked to write, but in the past two years she's become more serious about fiction writing, enjoying the support and camaraderie of awriters' group.



Surprised by joy (with apologies to C.S. Lewis)

My life has rarely gone as I expected. That used to annoy and frustrate me. I didn't easily want to give up my plans for myself and my future. But God knew that was exactly what I needed and he acted accordingly (again and again!) until I learned what he wanted to teach me.

When God acts on us, we don't have much choice but to comply. What mere human being – even as fearfully and wonderfully made as we are – can fight Almighty God's actions, intentions and purposes? Trying to ignore him or avoid his hand on us is a futile effort. The Patriarch Jacob learned that lesson well one long night millennia ago. He carried a souvenir of that night-class ever after. I doubt he enjoyed walking with a limp the rest of his days (and perhaps his hip hurt when it rained), but it was an indelible mark of God that surely reshaped his future attitudes and actions.

I'm not assuming I'm in a league with Jacob, but I've also felt God's reshaping hand. He knew what I needed when I myself did not, and when (perhaps like Jacob) I certainly wouldn't have chosen for myself some of what he sent me. One of those "gifts" was a compromised immune system and Crohn's disease. Another was the early deaths of my parents, a sister and a brother.

Learning to pray

As a teenager I became convinced even as my cancer-stricken mother was still alive that her illness taught me to pray, how to rely utterly on God for every minute need. I don't know exactly what *she* (and my father) went through, but I know that God turned to good a terrifying time (she was the person I was closest to in the world) that would have otherwise sapped not only her soul and strength, but my dad's and mine.

While the Crohn's, too, has caused periods of suffering over many years, I like to think that it – no, *God's hand* in it – has also sculpted me into a person more attuned to the sufferings of others than I otherwise would have been. I recognize, by now, what would have been my tendency to get wrapped up in my own affairs (and that tendency still surfaces when I allow myself to ignore God's promptings of my heart and conscience).

My work life, too, has turned out nothing like I expected. From childhood I assumed I would go to college and graduate school, then teach music history at a Christian college. I'd have the relative prestige that went with such a position and would retire comfortably. Well, I *did* get a master's degree in music history, but that's as far as that early dream went. God had other plans for me and the talents he graciously gave me. My musical talent has been used primarily in the church, not in academia. That has established friendships for me with many members of the Body of Christ from a variety of Christian denominations; and *that* has made me acutely aware of the worldwide bonds of faith that only Christ can cement and nurture, making non-essentials fall away.

Another bend in the road

I've also loved reading and writing from early childhood, but it never occurred to me that I would have ended up working for a unique Christian publication like *Calvinist Contact/Christian Courier*, or that I would eventually be led to write books. I admit I had to reconcile myself to the very moderate pay – but again I felt God's hand steering me to *CC* back in 1984, and to writing in general. That was perhaps God's greatest surprise for me and has become one of the most rewarding. I relish the opportunity to spread his Word in my writing. I pray that that indeed occurs, in this column and in my books.

A year-and-a-half ago God led me to a special diet and a benign but effective drug that together are controlling my Crohn's and giving me a level of health I've never felt before. That, in turn, allowed me this spring to accept another of God's surprises: a full-time, four-month-long job as a crew supervisor for the U.S. Census Bureau. For the first time in 10 years I was able to handle working full time. That, once again, taught me lessons about both myself and others. It gave me new confidence, allowed me to discover a set of talents I didn't know I had, and opened yet another world of friendships.

God's fatherly steering of my life in astonishing ways has by now caused me to look forward with joy – to be *surprised by joy* (C.S. Lewis's term) – to whatever he has in store for my life for as many days and years as he gives me. Thanks be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for all those gifts; and for his one unspeakable Gift.

Marian Van Til is a former C.C. editor who lives in Youngstown, NY. Her book about life with cats, Confessions of a Cataholic *can be ordered through< www.WordPowerPublishing.com> or email mvantil@roadrunner.com, or call 716-745-7073.*

Poor sad soul *...continued from p. 11*

Chaplain Greg always read all the letters out loud to me."

He looked at the chaplain, who nodded and unfolded some sheets of paper. "Michael has asked me to read one of the letters his mother wrote to him."

Dear Michael,

We've come to the start of another year. I didn't stay up late to celebrate. I'm not often in the mood for that. But I'm not complaining. I like the quiet. I do a lot of thinking and praying these long winter evenings. It helps me sleep. I never have lain awake regretful or bitter about what I can't change. I hope you had enough to eat today, and a restful sleep last night. I hope someone offered you a kind word. If not, just remember I never fall asleep without a loving thought of you, my dear son.

Love, Mother.

Greg Gallant went on: "Michael has also asked that I read to you a couple of Mrs. MacMillan's poems. There are over a hundred, but we chose the following two." He began to read.

Long is the winter until you return.
Thick is the ice on the pond.
Cold is the white sky.
Dead are the green things buried beneath
another snowfall.
Still is my heart, sleeping in its silent den,
awaiting the warm shudder of spring.
Long is the winter until you return.

Katherine's heart started beating rapidly, and she sat up straight and alert. Her mother was removing a mint from a crackly wrapper. "Hush, Mom." Her mother frowned at her.

"And then this one," said the chaplain.

These four walls are narrow:
five steps from table to bed,
where I lay myself to rest with a prayer
for you on my lips.
This street is narrow:
as I walk, I shrink from the eyes, the
glances,
deeper into my thoughts.
I could wish myself narrowed to
invisibility.
But my heart is wide.
It still holds you
All of you
All you are
All you have done
With room enough to spare.

Michael MacMillan covered his eyes with his hand and let out a loud, convulsive sob. There was no other sound. The chaplain put his hand on Michael's shoulder and they sat down. After a long silence, Rev. Allen stood. "Ahem, thank you," he said. "This concludes the service." Then he raised his hand and said in a perfunctory tone, "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace, now and forever. Amen."

Katherine could feel the people around her relax at the familiar words of closure, and a soft hum of conversation started up as people began to stand and move toward the aisles. "Well, well," Katherine's mother said. "Yes, so long, Ruth, see you at cards next Monday. I think I'll visit the ladies' room, dear, before we go. I'll meet you outside."

Katherine didn't look up. She did not want her mother to see the tears that had sprung so spontaneously to her eyes at the reading of the poems. How could she explain the rush of emotion that overcame her as she imagined the small, gray woman walking bent over along the road, lost in thought and prayer, her heart bursting with love? Did anyone here understand what they had just heard? She wished she could walk to the front and tell Michael MacMillan that he was wrong – that those poems were not the words of a person whose heart had been broken. But she couldn't do that. This wasn't a movie, after all. There was no old friendship or romance in the past to give her that right – just the feelings inside her that she wasn't sure she could express coherently.

But she would write to him, she thought with sudden determination. She would keep the chaplain's name in mind, and one day she would write and explain what the poems had meant to her – perhaps even ask if she might be allowed to see the entire collection. The thought satisfied her. As she stepped outside into the blazing heat, she felt refreshed by Mrs. MacMillan's simple, spare words.

Her mother was already in the car. "Well, ashes to ashes," she said placidly. "And you'll get to your train in plenty of time, like I said."

"I'm glad I was here for this, actually," Katherine said as she backed out of the parking spot. "I appreciated that poetry."

"It didn't rhyme, but I suppose that's the style nowadays," her mother said. "I would never in a million years have taken Margaret MacMillan for a writer of poetry." Then she sighed. "I hope to the Lord when I die I have more to show for myself than a son in jail and a handful of verses."

Katherine said nothing; she just eased the car out onto the street.

"Poor sad soul," her mother said.

"I was thinking the same thing," Katherine replied. Smiling wistfully, she patted her mother's hand. Neither of them spoke again, all the way to the station.

Christianity's social side: the Social Gospel movement and Labour (Part II)

Bert den Boggende

Theologically, the Social Gospel movement cannot easily be defined because it has different wings, different geographic places, and different ecclesiastical backgrounds. Thus the views described here don't necessarily apply to every group or individual. Two premises, however, seem to hold for most: Christianity was seen as a social religion concerned with the quality of human relations, and competitive individualism was regarded as the fundamental evil that could be overcome by industrial democracy.

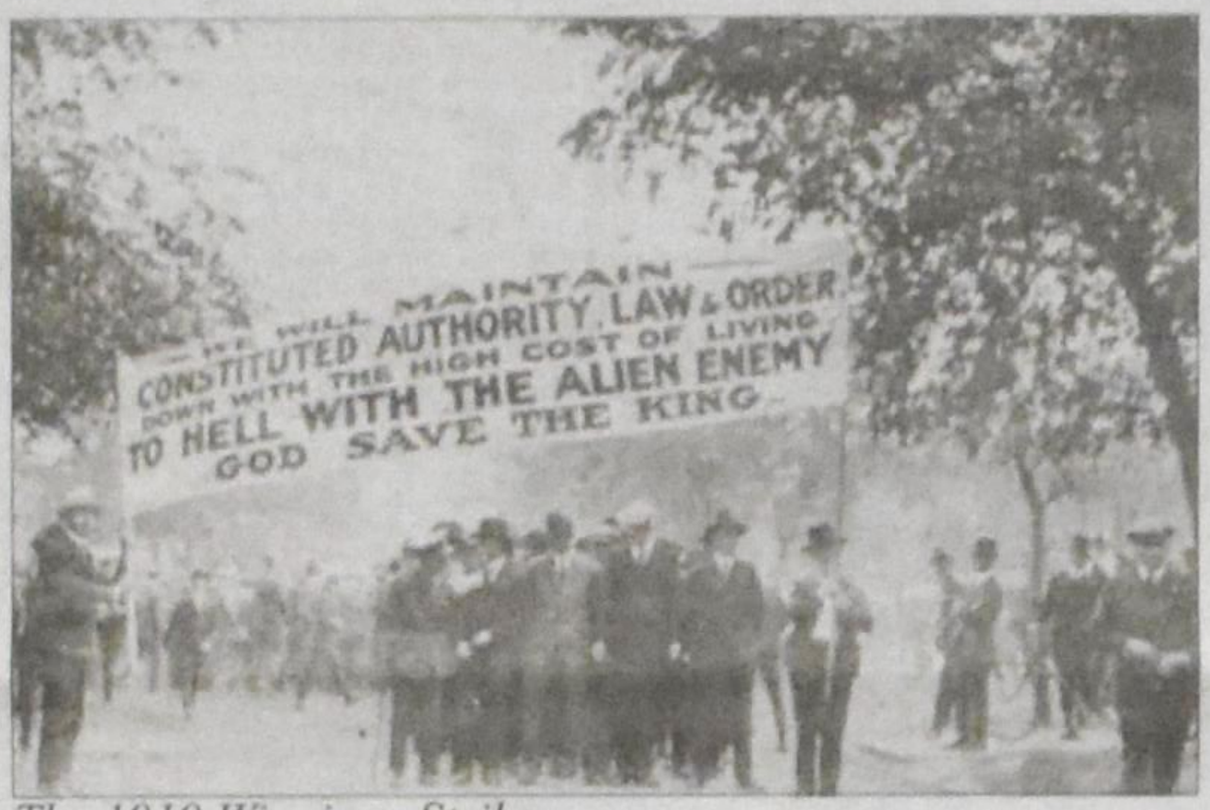
It seems to me that the search for a theology can only be understood when keeping these premises in mind. Canadian Christians always related the gospel to some parts of social life and always believed that social action was a religious duty; they also held that individual salvation would precede social regeneration. The Social Gospel wanted to relate the gospel to all of life, and some even held that social regeneration should precede individual salvation. Social Gospellers may never have heard of Kuyper's "square inch," but they proclaimed the same thing about the same time as Kuyper. They differed from Kuyper, however, in their much more optimistic view, thinking that they could reconstruct society based on democratic principles.

Rejected the fall

Put differently, they thought they could usher in God's Kingdom on earth themselves. Consequently, they emphasized God's immanent activities in the world, while largely ignoring God's mysterious transcendence. That optimism also led them to reject the doctrine of man's fall. They were less concerned about individual and more about societal regeneration. Although they expected the "new state" to overcome "big business," they also wanted the church to be the effective force for social change and thus gain the victory for evangelicalism. Over against the divisions among the people they emphasized the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man (which would replace class conflict). That emphasis manifested itself in cooperation, service, and valuing human personality.

For their ethics they turned to the Old Testament prophets, who, they argued, presented a clear analysis of social conditions and directed their ethical teachings at those who abused the resources of the nation, and to the Sermon on the Mount. They turned away from Paul, who, they argued, had complicated Jesus' simple gospel. Their ethical emphasis called for sanctification of society rather than for individual sanctification. In its more extreme form Social Gospellers held that religion was "simply the utmost reach of man – his highest thinking about the deepest things in life."

They abandoned many traditional doctrines, replacing them with an organic, progressive evolutionary view of society. As one historian has argued, they had inadequate doctrines of God, grace, sin, and the church. In their desire to make the Protestant churches culture builders, the churches became in effect little more than clearing houses for research and publicity, and lobbyists for reform legislation. One would not be too far amiss to conclude that in its more extreme form the Social Gospel lacked a systematic intellectual underpinning.



The 1919 Winnipeg Strike

Social involvement

Practically and theoretically, Social Gospellers concerned themselves with a wide range of issues. There were discussions about a weekly rest day; indeed, many strongly adhered to a rather strict Sunday. They talked about Canada's native peoples, child welfare, challenges to the churches, urbanization, and political issues. They posited that Christian love was sentimental if it was not translated into justice at the socio-political level. They advocated political purity, prohibition, prison reform, the abolition of gambling and prostitution (commercialized vice and white slave traffic). They sought improved educational facilities for the young, and amelioration of the poor conditions facing the working class. They researched industrial life, labour problems, the effects of immigration, and protested against industrial exploitations. They opposed the oppression of the poor and called for a world of social justice. As the American historian William McLoughlin has suggested, the Social Gospel wanted to combine science and religion to uplift the masses.

Views on work

Using science and sociology, Social Gospellers constructed some ideas about work. They viewed work, however hard and difficult, as a necessary element in the education of a human being. It contributed to the growth of character and taught people that they were instruments of a wider good than their own. The key issue to work was motivation: were the workers simply dissatisfied with their conditions and seeking to amass wealth, or were they motivated by an inner desire to improve the collective well-being of the community? The workers deserved support and applause if their attempts to gain higher wages and shorter work hours aimed at providing them with greater opportunities for social and moral progress. They stood condemned if their agitation arose out of a distaste for work or a love of money and ease.

The Presbyterian Social Service Council, a fairly representative Social Gospel body, suggested the application of Christian principles to the operations of industrial associations, whether of labour or capital, a more equitable distribution of wealth, the abolition of poverty, the protection of childhood, the safeguarding of the physical and moral health of women in industrial life, the adequate protection of working people in case of industrial accidents and occupational diseases, Sunday rest for every worker, conciliation and arbitration in industrial disputes (some Mackenzie King influence could be detected here), proper housing, and adequate care of dependent and handicapped persons. Aspects of this list would not raise many eyebrows today.

Success and failure

The Social Gospel seemed to have a lot going for it to attract the workers, but its success was questionable. While the working classes sought greater control over the factors that determined wages and working conditions, the churches had a hard time identifying with these labour issues in meaningful ways. Many influential church members adhered to a *laissez-faire* perspective of the economy, viewing those left behind in the struggle as lazy, incompetent, or immoral. Moreover, it offered few resources for dealing with the social ills of spreading slums or with inadequately paid workers, who suffered from poor housing, high medical costs, and economic insecurity. The *laissez-faire* perspective hardly endeared them to the working classes.

Suggested corrections were often hardly adequate. Conservative Social Gospellers usually emphasized personal and ethical issues combined with some legislative reform, while progressive Social Gospellers favoured some state intervention, although they would not go as far as did the socialists, who they thought undermined the solidarity of the community by pitting class against class. Only the radical wing approved of socialism.

Moreover, most leading Social Gospel figures were middle-class people, concerned with social respectability and stability. And, while in theory they had sympathy for the working class, they were all too often far removed from the experiences of the workers. Many Presbyterians were anti-union, identifying it with advocacy of modernism and church union. In addition, they argued that the welfare of the nation rather than the rights of working people were paramount. The effect of the Social Gospel on the workers was thus rather mixed. Few were attracted to the Social Gospel; in fact, they were often attracted to traditional evangelical preaching, while, at the same time, middle-class congregations began to endorse the new, modern tenets of the Social Gospel.

A number of workers who were attracted to Christianity formed labour churches, which on the whole did not survive very long. The strikes of 1919, especially the one in Winnipeg, only aggravated the tenuous connection between labour and the churches. The irony is that, while the churches began to respond to labour upheavals, the workers showed limited interest in the gospel. In other words, the Social Gospel was not able to overcome the disconnect between the churches and workers.

No theological balance

Before the Social Gospel grew strong, people realized there were social problems, but they thought these could be solved by harnessing individual energies and individual wills. In contrast, the Social Gospel posited that the solution could only come through collective effort. Their perspective experienced a boost during World War I when the state exercised significant control over industry. Salem Bland, one of the more radical Social Gospellers, even came to regard public ownership as an essential part of the Kingdom of God on earth, and an attack on it was an attack on Christianity. Politically the Social Gospel manifested itself to some extent in the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) and the United Farmers of Ontario (UFO).

In the process of reconnecting the gospel with all rather than parts of life, the Social Gospel at times failed to keep a theological balance. This is certainly true for its radical wing. Rather than Christianizing the nation, as was fervently hoped, it may even have contributed to the secularization of society, as some scholars have argued. But the theological weakness should not prevent us from recognizing its strength: the gospel's claim to be relevant to all of life. More than likely the conservative and progressive wings of the Social Gospel movement would be very much in agreement with the activities of such later 20th- and 21st-century organizations as the Christian Labour Association of Canada, Citizens for Public Justice, Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, and Christian Farmers' organizations, who seek to connect the gospel with society.

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Note: The complete article including References can be found on our website: www.christiancourier.ca and click on Reader Resourses > Feature Articles.

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Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., serves as president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary – the flagship school of the Southern Baptist Convention and one of the largest seminaries in the world.

July 23, 2010

Evangelicals and Science in Conversation – A One-Way Street?

From time to time, a column in a newspaper is more revealing than its author probably intended it to be. That seems to be the case with "Myths Widen the Science-Religion Divide" by Elaine Howard Ecklund, published in the July 19, 2010 edition of *USA Today*. In her essay, Professor Ecklund suggests that science and religion can enter into a constructive dialogue. But a closer look at her essay reveals that this dialogue, at least as it involves most Christians, is a one-way street.

Elaine Howard Ecklund teaches sociology at Rice University and is the author of a recently released book, *Science vs Religion: What Scientists Really Think*. In her *USA Today* column, Professor Ecklund argues, based on her extensive research, that "the conversation between science and religion is besieged by misunderstanding and myths on both sides."

As she continues her argument: "Some of the assumptions of the present science-religion debates simply do not hold up under the weight of research data. Dispelling myths about religious and scientific communities could lay the groundwork for a new kind of dialogue – one based more on serious thinking and scholarship than caricature."

Any serious person will prefer serious thinking and scholarship to caricature, and Professor Ecklund has indeed provided much food for thought. Her column is interesting, but her book is far more important and substantial.

In *USA Today*, Professor Ecklund attempted to correct the view she says is held by many religious believers – that scientists are predominately secular and antagonistic to theistic faith. Many believers, she says, "hold scientists at arm's length, believing that they are all atheists who are interested in attacking religion and the religious community."

In conducting her research, Professor Ecklund surveyed 1,700 natural and social scientists and conducted interviews with 275 of them. Her research is most interesting as it focuses on "elite" scientists who have particular influence. In order to set the record straight, in her column she shared some of the data from her research. She reports that 30 percent of scientists are atheists. She concedes that this is "a much larger percentage than the general population."

This is what we can only call a gross understatement. According to the authoritative study undertaken by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, about 5 percent of Americans report themselves as not believing in any deity, but only a quarter of those actually call themselves atheists. In other words, the scientists Professor Ecklund surveyed reported themselves to be atheists at a rate at least six times the national average – and perhaps at a rate even much higher than that.

She says that "fewer than six percent of atheist scientists are working against religion," but the reader is left to wonder exactly what this is supposed to mean. Presumably, it means that few elite scientists follow the model of Richard Dawkins in spending a great deal of their time attempting to argue against the danger of theism. That certainly does not leave the rest friendly to belief in God . . . or to believers.

Professor Ecklund reports that about half of all scientists report themselves to be religious in some sense, and some 20 percent are involved in some house of worship. "Top scientists are sitting in our country's churches, temples, and mosques," she asserts.

Well, a closer look at her research indicates that these "top scientists" are rather thin on the ground in more conservative sectors of Christianity. Consider her report that "there are 14 times more self-identified evangelicals in the general population than among the scientists at our nation's top universities."

In her book, Professor Ecklund provides a wealth of data and analysis that, in general, casts her column in a quite different light. For example, she reports that "scientists in general are much less likely than are members of the general population to identify as part of a traditional religion." Fully 50 percent of the scientists she surveyed reported themselves as having no religious affiliation, compared to 16 percent of the general population.

Only about 2 percent of these scientists identified as evangelical Christians. Far more reported themselves as Jewish, but defined more by tradition than theistic belief.

"On the whole, scientists tend to view themselves as religiously liberal," she acknowledges. And in another understated passage, she reports this: "When we hold this liberalism alongside the fact that scientists at elite U.S. research universities are the least likely to be evangelicals (at least to label themselves so), and that evangelicalism is heavily represented in the general population, we see that scientists who care about translating science to a general public might need a lot of help to do so effectively." You think?

She writes that "it is virtually impossible to find a group of Americans who do not believe in God," but she concedes that only 36 percent of these elite scientists "have some form of a belief in God." That would seem to leave 64 percent without any such belief.

Scientists who do have some belief in God tend to have what Professor Ecklund describes as a "closeted faith." She explains that "religious scientists generally tried to keep their faith to themselves because of the perception that other faculty in their departments think poorly of religious people and religious ideas." The result is "a strong culture of suppression."

Well, if Professor Ecklund was trying to counter the "myth" that science is basically secular and antagonistic to theistic belief, she had better hope that people read her *USA Today* article and not her book.

In the other angle of her argument, Professor Ecklund reports in her article that "scholars are also finding that evangelical Christianity is not as detrimental to acquiring scientific knowledge as they once thought."

Really? In both the book and her article, this argument seems to come down to the fact that the price of being considered "not as detrimental to acquiring scientific knowledge as . . . once thought" is the embrace of evolution and the relinquishment of objections to human embryonic stem cell research.

When it comes to the big public battles over science and faith, this professor clearly sides with the scientists. In fact, both the book and her article are cast as an effort to help scientists make their arguments more plausible (and to protect their research funding) in the context of a nation with so many evangelical believers.

The great obstacle – evangelical parents. Professor Ecklund laments that "many young Americans may not be learning what they should about science because their religious upbringing poses a barrier." In her book she argues that many younger Americans "are not learning what they should about science because their parents' quarrels and impasses are holding them back from studying topics like evolution or from pursuing science careers (out of fear that such pursuits are incompatible with their religious beliefs)."

Once again, if Professor Ecklund hopes that younger Americans will think otherwise, she had better hope that these kids don't read her book.

We are in debt to Professor Ecklund for her massive and persuasive research as documented and presented in her book, even if her *USA Today* article seems to be a deliberate attempt to tell only part of the story.

Her research leaves us with much to consider, but one big message comes through loud and clear – evangelical Christians who seek a better public conversation with elite science had better know in advance that it is a one-way street.

posted by Albert Mohler

Widening the circle: nurturing the multi-ethnic church

Rachel Boehm Van Harmelen

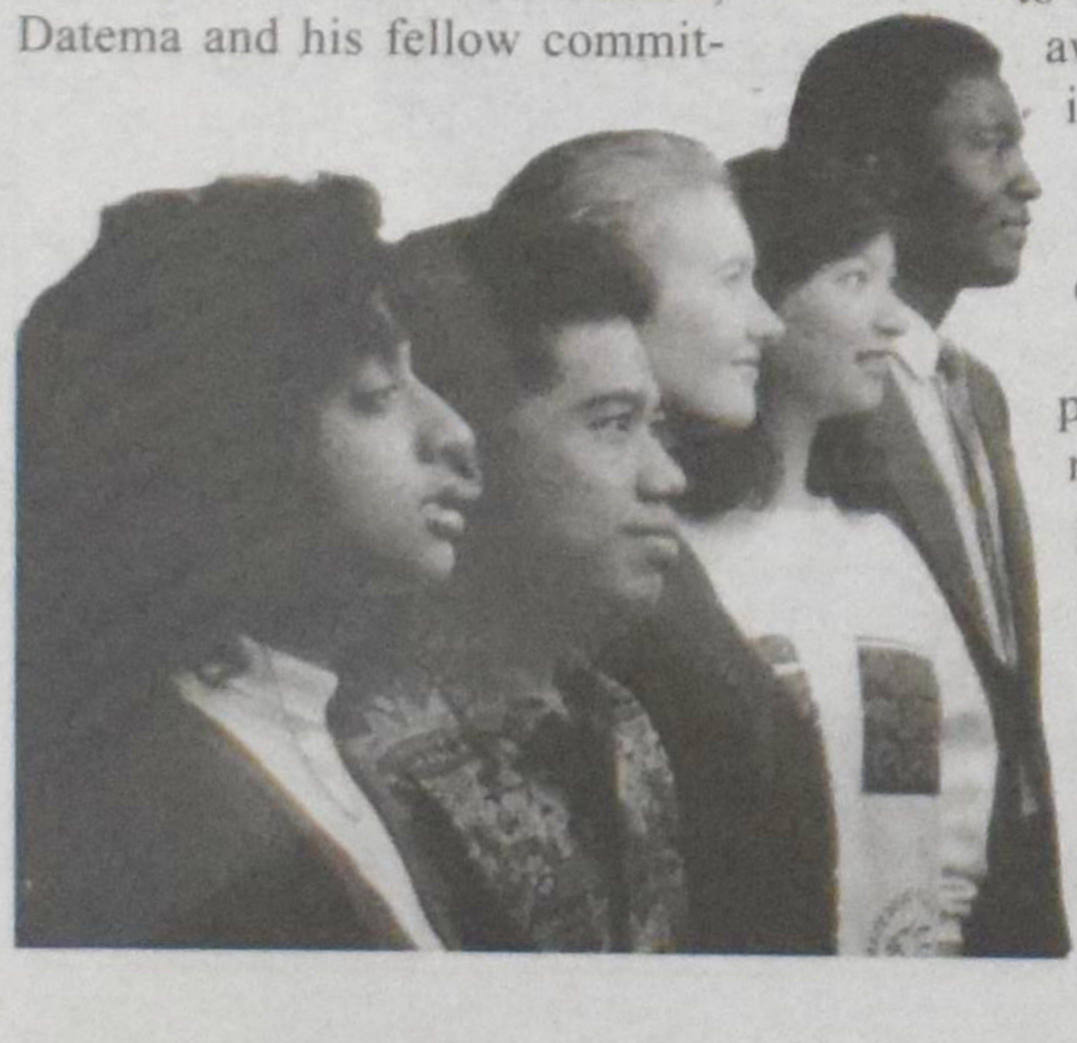
The City of Toronto ranks among one of the most multicultural cities in the world, with over 140 languages and dialects spoken there. "Diversity is our Strength" boasts Toronto's motto, and its population mirrors that vision. Just over 30 percent of Toronto's residents speak a language other than French or English at home. Half of Toronto's current population of 2.48 million people was born outside of Canada. Of the 1.1 million international immigrants Canada received between 2001 and 2006, Toronto welcomed one quarter of them. With statistics like this, it is not surprising that Toronto's churches are realizing that their capacity to survive – and thrive – in today's city will depend on how well they adapt to these sweeping demographic changes. Will they be able to embrace diversity?

"While we recognize that Toronto is a very diverse city, our churches are not always reflective of that," says Rev. Rob Datema, a member of the Race Relations Committee for the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) in the Toronto area. As Executive Director of The Lighthouse – a multi-ethnic community centre that offers counselling, immigrant settlement services and children's and senior's programs in downtown Toronto – Datema understands that embracing diversity doesn't just happen. It is something that both individuals and institutions must work at, and training and equipping are crucial. Churches need help to learn how to make their communities welcoming places for people of different linguistic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. That transformation needs to happen, says Datema, and equipping pastors is a good place to start.

As a member of the Toronto-area Race Relations Committee for the Christian Reformed Church, Datema and his fellow commit-

tee members saw an opportunity to help Toronto-area pastors gain some practical skills in nurturing multi-ethnic congregations through a grant program offered by the CRCs Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) program. The committee approached the regional body of the CRC in Toronto, known as Classis Toronto, and presented their ideas, which were warmly received. Next they applied for, and received, a grant to create a peer learning group for pastors with the theme "Learning to Develop a Multi-Ethnic Congregation."

Ten pastors signed up to be members of the peer learning group, and they were joined by Datema and other members of the Race Relations Committee. "Our first activity was to attend a symposium on multi-ethnic issues held at Richmond Hill Chinese Community Church," recalls Datema, an experience that opened their eyes to the beauty and diversity of the Christian community in their city. After that, the peer learning group held a fall retreat in which they used materials from the learning program "Widening the Circle: Opening to Diversity and Undoing Racism" * to explore their biases, understand the context of racism in the church and in Canada, and to increase their self-awareness and skills in opposing racism and building relationships in their communities.



Datema and his peers also met on a monthly basis for prayer and encouragement, forming triads within their peer group to encourage each other and pray together. "We looked for ways we could challenge each other with the things we were learning," says Datema.

Leadership and Welcoming

Throughout their peer-group activities, Datema says their biggest learning was the "need to be intentional in the welcoming and leadership aspects." Datema and his peers examined their personal and congregational practices. "We asked ourselves questions about how we welcome people in our church. And we looked at our leadership. Is it reflective of the communities we serve?"

Datema explains that examining leadership practices from a multi-ethnic perspective includes taking a look at hiring practices when recruiting for staff positions, but it also applies to how unpaid church positions such as elders and deacons, youth leaders, and educators are filled. "For example, when a church hires an outreach coordinator, they can think about ways of recruiting individuals who are reflective of the community around them," Datema says. "Churches can look at the diversity of their elders and deacons groups."

Training and Celebrating

Datema and his peer group weren't content to keep their learnings to themselves. They understood that the work of becoming multi-ethnic requires the commitment and passion of entire congregations – not just a few leaders. They decided that their next steps would be to expand the impact of their peer group experiences by sharing what they had learned at larger venues.

"The first event took place in October at a Classis Toronto meeting where each church has a pastor and council member in attendance," says Datema. "We led an equipping session on what our peer group had learned during the past year. Through a time of worship, with singing and scripture, we focused on different aspects of being a multi-ethnic church. Following that, we showed the Canadian film, *Journey to Justice*. This film provided us with a starting point to break barriers that we as people and churches create to not allow diversity," Datema says. "Following the film, we met in small groups to talk about how prejudices and stereotypes limit us from being a truly diverse church."

Next, Datema and the group

Continued on p. 16

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Challenges /Ads

Co-owning the Earth

Bert Hielema

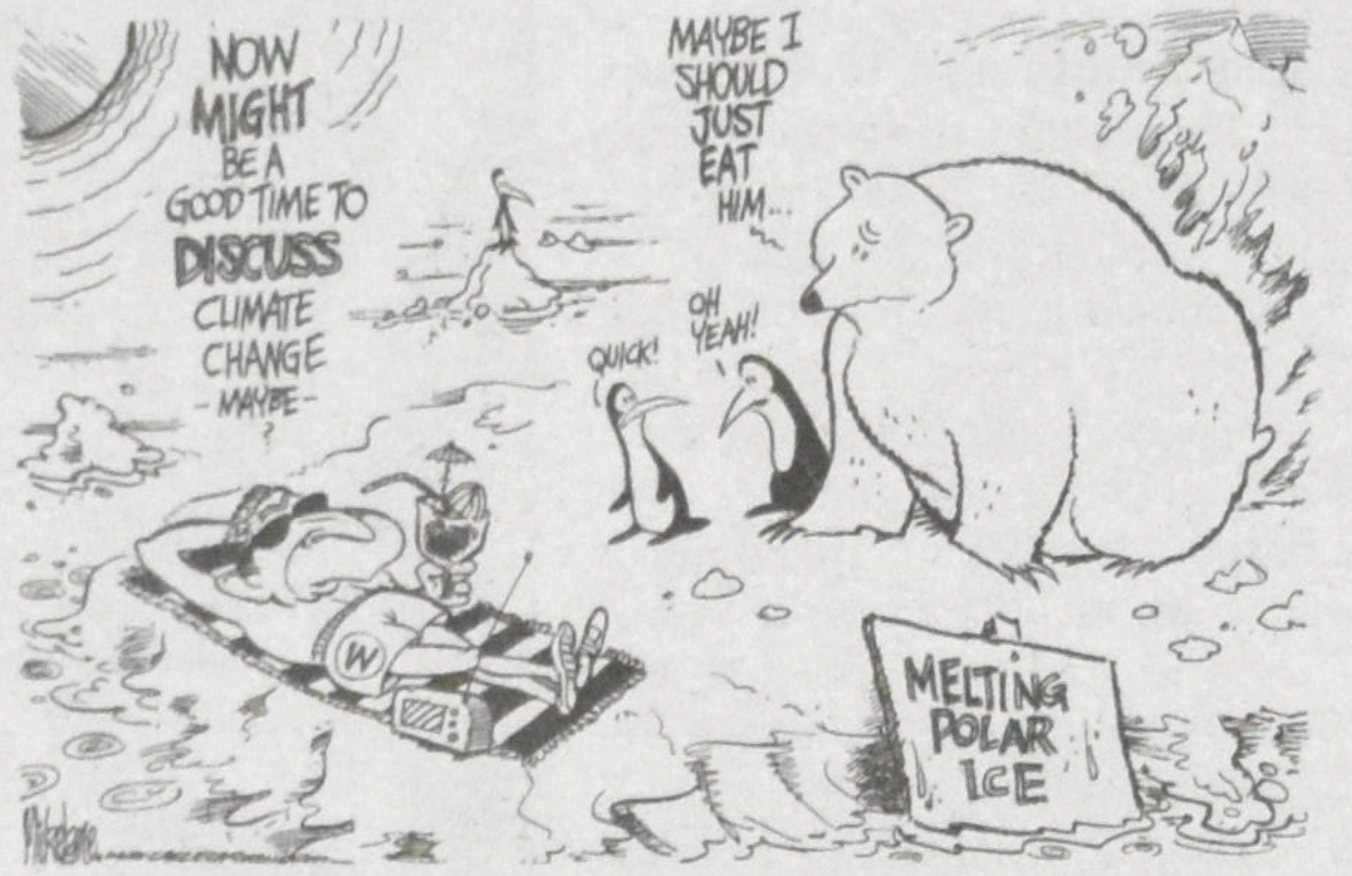
Are we up to the task?

Are we capable of ruling the earth? – that's the title of a book I bought in 1987, except it is written in Dutch: *Kunnen wij de AARDE beheren."* The author is Professor Dr Jan Tinbergen, one of the seven Dutch Nobel Prize winners. He taught Bob Goudzwaard when he studied at the Economic Faculty of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. Wheras Psalm 8:6 expresses our divine assignment: "You have made him ruler over the works of your hands," Tinbergen wonders whether we are up to that task. The Dutch word *behe(e)ren* has as root the word *heer* which means Lord or Ruler. So the title's literal translation is: "Are we really capable of being a ruler over the earth?"

My reality check is tempered by the caveat that I am a charter member of the exclusive club of columnists whose motto is "Saepe mendosus, nunquam dubius" (Often in error, never in doubt).

A lot has happened since Tinbergen wrote this 170-page book in 1986. Then Global Warming was still a non-issue, while nuclear danger dominated thinking. No wonder peace on earth then was seen as the prerequisite to survival. "If we cannot maintain peace," Tinbergen concluded, "humanity has signed its own death warrant."

Now, in 2010, war is universal. While nuclear danger has not faded, on the contrary, far more fatal is the global environmental conflict: humanity against creation, expressed in economic growth at all costs, slaying seas, soil, sanity and especially the future of our children and grandchildren. We now face the ultimate consequences of exponential growth, so aptly expressed by Capitalism as "creative destruction." This "faith" has been so successful that now it is bumping against the Limits of Growth, manifest in ferocious floods in the Far East, droughts and fires in Russia, man-made oil-spills and cancer-rates galore, and heat waves everywhere – all symptoms of Global Warming. Kenneth E. Boulding wrote a few years ago that "*Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist."*



A stark choice

Matters are moving much more quickly. In nature we see the rapid melting of Arctic Sea ice. There the much darker waters absorb more solar radiation, causing more warming, causing more ice to melt, causing more warming…. and even more ominously, causing the tundra to release billions of tons of methane gases, a substance 20 times more lethal than automobile exhausts. Dr James Hansen, the head of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, who studied in the Netherlands and married there, and who is the world's foremost climate expert, has warned that us – you and me – warming the planet is "a recipe for global disaster."

' Deuteronomy 30: 19 comes to mind. As never before, we face a stark choice: life or death, blessings or curses, following the laws inherent in creation, shalom, peace among people, peace with the earth, or total destruction.

Are we capable of managing the earth? Without a complete reversal – metanoia – of our political, economic, religious and personal life we will have to deal with climate upheaval of a scale unprecedented in human history, while simultaneously coping with an economic depression that will make 1930 look like a Golden Age, and WWII a minor inconvenience. The longer we burn fossil fuels, the deeper the climate catastrophe is going to be.

Bert Hielema (bert@hielema.ca) sees little signs that society takes Global Warming or Peak Oil seriously. Revelation 9:20-21 comes to mind.

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...Bert DenBoggende

Read Bert's full review in the June 28 issue of *CC*

To order the book, phone **778.395.6693** or go to the website:
www.richardoostra.com

Widening the circle*...continued from p. 15*

planned a large, multi-ethnic worship service to coincide with the CRC's annual All Nations Heritage Sunday. "There were 250 people in attendance," Datema says. "There were people from Vietnam, the Philippines, Guyana, the Netherlands, Kenya, Nigeria, Mexico, China, Korea, Canada, the U.S. and other places."

"We had a speaker, communion, a time to socialize and to share a variety of foods representing many different ethnic communities," Datema says. "It was like we were in heaven. It was so diverse. We hadn't realized how diverse our Toronto-area Christian Reformed churches already are."

Datema says people walked away from the event saying they now better understood the Biblical image, presented in Revelation 7:9, of people from every nation worshipping around the throne. In that heavenly city, Toronto's motto "Diversity is our strength," will no longer be a vision – but a reality. "This event gave us a glimpse of what our communities will look like when we work at becoming a multi-ethnic church," Datema says.

* To learn more about the Widening the Circle learning program, please contact Steve Kabetu, Race Relations coordinator in Canada, at 905-336-2920 or 1-800-730-3490. For U.S. churches, a similar learning program called the "Dance of Racial Reconciliation (DORR) is available through the Christian Reformed Church's office of Race Relations. For more information or to schedule a workshop, please call the Office of Race Relations at (877) 864-3977.

1. Directed by Roger McTair, produced by Karen King-Chigbo, National Film Board of Canada, 2000 (47 minutes). To learn more, visit www.onf-nfb.gc.ca.

The Multi-Ethnic Church Reading List

A Many Colored Kingdom by Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, S. Steve Kang, and Gary A. Parrett (Baker, 2004)

Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church by Mark Deymaz (Jossey-Bass, 2007)

One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches by George Yancey (Inter-varsity Press, 2003)

One New People: Models for Developing a Multi-Ethnic Church by Manuel Ortiz (Inter-varsity Press, 1996)

Multicultural Ministry: Finding Your Church's Unique Rhythm by David Anderson (Zondervan, 2004)

Reaching the World in Our Own Backyard Reaching the World in Our Own Backyard: A Guide to Building Relationships with People of Other Faiths and Cultures by Rajendra K. Pillai (WaterBrook Press, 2010)

Rachel Boehm is a communications specialist and a freelance writer. She lives near Halifax, Nova Scotia, with her family.

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Jake and Jean Feenstra

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married in Holland August 30,1950
came back to reside in Woodstock, Ontario

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from 2 - 4 p.m.
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The Lord has blessed us richly and we praise his Holy Name!

Rev. Martin and Ada Geleynse

With joy and thanksgiving we look forward to celebrating the following special events, the Lord willing:

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We landed in Montreal on August 11, 1960

60th Wedding Anniversary
Vlaardingen, The Netherlands - August 31 - Stratford, Ontario, Canada

60th Anniversary of Martin's ordination to the ministry
September 10

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Retirement

Covenant CRC of Woodstock, Ontario announces the **retirement** of our

Associate Pastor, **Rev. Gerald Hogeterp**

after **41 years of service.**

Rev. Hogeterp and his wife Jackie faithfully served churches in High River, First Chilliwack, Bethel Saskatoon, Calvary Ottawa & Covenant Woodstock and served as missionaries with Christian Reformed World Missions in Nigeria.

An **evening of celebration** is planned for **Saturday, August 28**, 2010 with dinner and a program.

Rev. Hogeterp will preach his farewell sermon in a service of celebration on **August 29**, 2010. For more information, please contact the church office at woodcoveadmin@bellnet.ca

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Aug 22 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

Aug 28, 29 Frsian Weekend, Tillsonburg Fairgrounds. See ad for details.

Oct 16 Diaconal Ministries invites you to attend a Day of Encouragement: come to celebrate God through worship and enjoy training in ministry and learning from others at Hamilton District Christian High, **Ancaster**. The theme for the day is "Fan the Flame." Many different workshops are being prepared for you! This day is open to everyone! After August 1, 2010: contact your deacons for more information or visit www.diaconalministries.com to register.

Oct 20 Leendert Kooij and his O.C.M.A. Choir will do a benefit concert for Eurovangelism/EuroAid at the Hebron Christian Reformed Church in **Whitby**. We invite you to join us for a great evening! Please call us at 1-866-630-6301 for more info.

Oct 23 Leendert Kooij and his O.C.M.A. Choir will do a benefit concert for Eurovangelism/EuroAid at St. George's Anglican Church in **Guelph** We invite you to join us for a great evening! Please call us at 1-866-630-6301 for more info.

Nov 5 Christian Festival Concert 7:30 pm, Roy Thomson Hall, **Toronto**. See ad.

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A DAY OF ENCOURAGEMENT
October 16, 2010
Hamilton District Christian High
The theme for the day is "Fan the Flame."
See calendar of events or contact your deacons for more information or visit www.diaconalministries.com to register.

FRISIAN WEEKEND

Saturday, August 28 at 1:00 pm
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Refreshments will be available.
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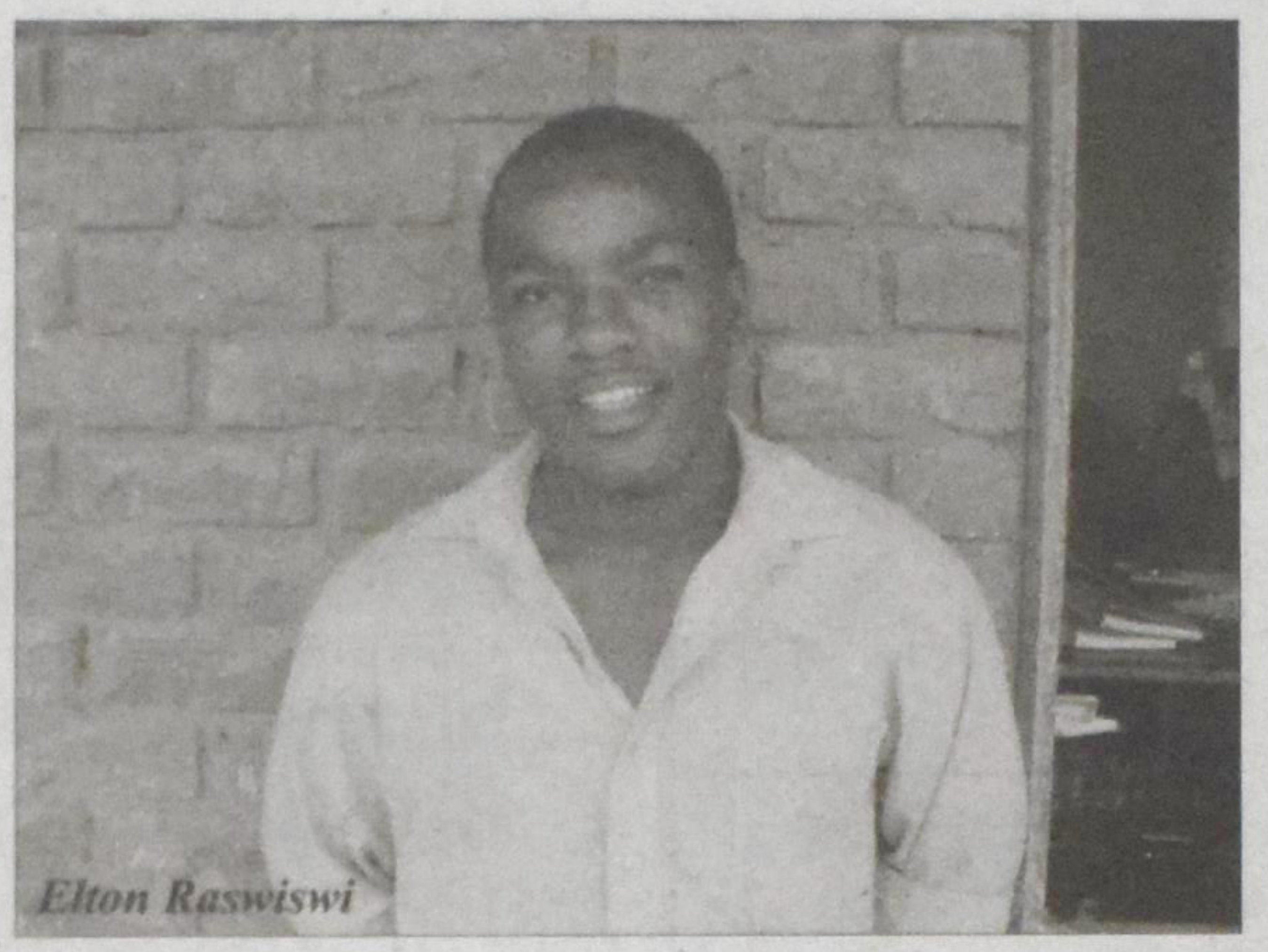
A word of advice

Bert Witvoet



Elton Raswiswi

The student body of Mahonisi Christian Learning Centre was gathered for Friday morning devotions. Some 300 learners were standing in rows of 10 in front of the teachers. I had been asked to take care of devotions. So I told the story of Daniel in the lion's den. Even though we all know the outcome, the story is full of suspense as you never know what lions will do when you're not looking. After my story and a brief prayer, a Grade 11 student stepped forward to give some advice to his school friends. He first addressed Grade 10 students, then his classmates, then Grade 12 students.

Elton Raswiswi could have been in Grade 12 himself, but last year he did not apply himself to his studies and failed his grade. He apparently had learned a valuable lesson and wanted to pass it on this fellow students.

Opportunity for freedom

A few days later I asked him about that year of failure. His parents, who had enrolled him in another school, thought that the quality of education left something to be desired there. So they asked him if he was in agreement to be sent to a boarding school in Polokwana, some 200 kilometers south of Waterval, where they live. He agreed that it might be a good idea. The thought of a big city without parental oversight appealed to him, he told me. Having new experiences and meeting new friends also was to his liking. It was a rich-man's school with mostly black students and an all-white staff. Actually, the teachers were university profs who lectured rather than taught. One can imagine the freedom Elton must have felt.

Elton decided to enjoy life and focus on his social life. He stopped going to church and, eventally, he stopped praying. His first math test predicted the outcome of his new-found life: he got 12 out of 50. But the results were not immediately addressed. It took quite a few more failures before the school called his parents. By that time, the year was pretty much lost. Elton felt bad. He started to pray again. "But the more you do that, the more the devil goes after you," he told me. Nothing really changed so he gave up on God. But God did not give up on him, and he finally came to his senses. "I realized that God made me fail for a reason."

This year, he and his parents thought he should do Grade 11 over again, but this time at Mahonisi, a Christian school with a strong family atmosphere. When I interviewed him, he proudly told me that he was at he top of his class, and he felt closer to God than he had ever felt.

Voice of experience

So what did he tell his fellow students that Friday morning after I had hauled Daniel out of the lion's den with a rope? He started out by saying, "I greet you in the name of Christ." Then he told the Grade 10 students that "good things come to those who wait." He was referring especially to dating. He spoke from his negative experience with dating last year.

To the Grade 11s he said, "Falling off a truck is not what matters. What matters is do you get up or not?" He was referring to his academic failures last year. Finally, to the Grade 12s he said, "G.I.G.O." He explained that G.I.G.O. stood for: "garbage in, garbage out." He was thinking of how he had filled himself with garbage last year, and he urged his fellow students not to do that but to work hard.

I could tell by watching the faces of his fellow students that they reacted positively to his advice. In this society sincere advice, at least in the Christian schools, is not spurned. I marvelled at Elton's eagerness to use the mistakes in his own life as a warning for his new friends at Mahonisi. At the end he turned toward the owner of the school, Mrs. Esther Masia, and he thanked her for giving him another chance to redeem himself.

Elton had not exactly been a Daniel, who, I had told the students, served the Lord with utmost integrity. Elton had thrown *himself* to the lions. But the same God who rescued Daniel also rescued Elton, not because he was innocent like Daniel but because Jesus was.

She leads her flock like a mother

Bert Witvoet

Esther Masia (on right) conversing with Grade 12 students

ELIM, Limpopo – Esther Masia is a short woman with little formal education. But she makes up for her stature and educational standing with a strong personality and lots of conviction about faith and God. She started Mahonisi Christian Learning Centre as a crèche in 1995. The parents appreciated her positive influence so much that they asked her to continue with Kindergarten and, eventually, with Grade 1. The crèche became a school.

It didn't take long for Esther to realize that she needed someone with a university education to continue her leading role. She called on her daughter Tsakane to first teach and then become the principal of the school. Today, Mahonisi goes all the way up to Grade 12. Last year was the first year the school took part in final matriculation exams, and the outcome was a surprising 84% pass rate.

Esther takes pride in that result, but she is especially focused on the spiritual and moral development of the learners. Although Tsakane is the principal, students usually come to Esther with their problems. I caught an incident the other day that confirmed Esther's status in the school.

Normative talk

She was standing in the midst of a group of 12 students, who were listening intently to her. They were talking in Venda, which I can't understand. So I asked Esther what she was saying to the students. "These are my children," she said with a big smile. "I always sit down and talk with them. I tell them they must work hard and listen to their teachers. I also tell them they must stay close to God. "If you look at the teacher as your parents," she said to the students, "You will meet your goals."

I then asked the students what they thought of that. "It's good," they said. "Mme. Masia is our mother." Everyone nodded. Esther pointed out that she is not in it for the money. She has allowed six students to enrol at her school without having to pay tuition money. Most of the time it's because their parents are too poor or the students are without a parent or two.

Prayer first

"I know all the parents," says Esther. "My daughter is the principal. She deals with the curriculum and the teachers. I always connect with learners and make relationship. If the child misbehaves, we call the parents and talk with them, the learner and the teacher. If the teacher is not teaching a child well, I sit down with the teacher and the child. But first we pray."

In the midst of an educational system in South Africa that is in deep trouble, schools like Mahonisi are an oasis. There is commitment to the learners, and there is a spirit of openness to the integrity of faith and learning. Africa will be saved, as the song goes, as long as Christian schools and their staff and parents believe and pray, because that way the Holy Spirit *must* come down. In Canada we sing, "The Holy Spirit *will* come down, but not here. "Must" is a favourite expression in a culture that appreciates advice and that willingly submits to the strict even somewhat bossy but always loving moral instruction of someone like Esther Masia.

Bert wrote these articles while in South Africa as part of a four-person team of educators sent out by Worldwide Christian Schools